A WAY OF LIFE: KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AMONG BLACK COWBOYS

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This project is an ethnography that engages participants and readers in multifaceted and multi-vocal formations of black masculinity and manhood in Western culture. I will present narratives set in different venues for black Western cultural practices where black cowboys communicate information about gender roles and norms. I represent black masculinities among three groups, or types of cowboys— ranchers, rodeo cowboys, and Trail riders— to capture multiple masculinities. In this study, I define black cowboys as Black/African-Americans who participate in ranching, rodeoing, and trailriding. I also make references to Black women who participate in these Western cultural practices and I consider them to be cowboys as well. My broader research question asks how black men transmit cultural information about masculinity through black Western cultural practices.

I examine intimate moments of exchange among some groups of contemporary cowboys and look at mechanisms they use to shift racist ideologies. Where knowledge is currency, the person who understands how social and cultural capital is at stake is also able to code switch and maintain a balance in social-cultural differences of opinion. As a black cowboy, the professional rodeo roper destabilizes notions of blackness. However, notions of racial superiority (or inferiority) manifest in subtle ways through jokes, nicknames, and personal experiences in this new context of an inverted hierarchy. Black cowboys engage in ways of negotiating other people's perceptions of dissent in the way blackness or masculinity should be performed that are two-fold throughout this study.

First, the idea that a racialized cowboy assumes a masculinity that, for the white people, and many black people, is illegible. Second, the process of teaching and learning black cultural forms of navigating white male racist patriarchal expressions.

My position is that cowboys' performances of masculinity challenge common sense understandings about contemporary black male identities because their masculinized experiences illustrate mechanisms used to navigate the complex relationship, or the false dichotomy, between (male) privilege and (racial) marginalization for this group. My method for collecting data is based on specific efficacious goals for the individual, context, and experience. The experiences (re)presented here construct a narrative that complicates generalized notions about masculinities as they intersect at multiple sociological factors among this section of black culture.

DEDICATION

To Omar Darnell Babers. This is my love letter to you and all the black men who have changed the way black manhood looks in America, despite forces of racist and sexist hegemonic traditions in U.S. history and popular media representations. #iSeeYou.

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INTRODUCTION

"They say it ain't no black cowboys" – Melva

The history of the American West is one in which blackness is perceived to have no place in the westward expansion and building of U.S. territory. To this end, notions of a western blackness or black western culture are scarce. My journey locating where I might discover information about black cowboys in U.S. history was challenging personally and professionally because of the peculiarity of my focus on masculinity in general and black cowboys as the exemplar of that identity. In particular, I started constructing these foundations with the archive of materials housed in public resources— libraries and museums— where we display and memorialize important artifacts that represent various aspects of U.S. national culture, society, and identity.

What I found is that the cowboy is disproportionately represented as a white male who is celebrated as protector of the western frontier while living above the law. The narrative constructed around the way cowboys policed the "wild" western frontier illustrates how it was (and in the way of contemporary law enforcement, still is) permissible to use unofficial means of dealing with Native Americans, or other ethnic minorities, who are considered a threat to the manifest destiny of civilized "white" society. The archive of American masculine representations suggests that black masculinities cannot be complex renderings of hero and outlaw. I came to this conclusion because of the lack of representation of black cowboys.

The information that I found on my own, a book highlighting exceptional black cowboys in history published by Texas A&M University in 2000 and an obscure documentary about black cowboys in Brooklyn, NY, was not enough[1]. I was working on a theory about how contemporary black cowboys in Houston landed there by way of The Great Migration. My idea provides an alternate narrative of The Great Migration as the movement of people from South to North and required sources for the historical presence of Black Cowboys in West Texas. This narrative emphasizes the movement of people from rural to urban locations. For the rural cowboys in Texas this meant the decision to move from south Texas to north Texas landing in Dallas or, more significantly, from west to (south-) east Texas landing in Houston. My next stop was to visit a professor specializing in the history of West Texas to get recommendations for sources that offer detailed information about socio-cultural contexts of Black cowboys in Texas.

Now that I think back to that time, though I was not completely aware of it then, I was looking for narrative information that I now know exists in the minds of my study participants. Still, I found a historian who specialized in "Texas and [the] history of the South" and when we met he did not seem to share the same level of excitement about the topic as I did, at least not outwardly. He also made me feel as though there was nothing worth pursuing about Black cowboys. Our meeting was brief. I walked into his office

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[1] 2004. The Federation of Black Cowboys/ Mixed Greens Presents. Directed by Eric Martz, Zachary Mortensen, Victoria Toth and T. Griffin. Produced by Mixed Greens, Llc,
Massey, Sara R. 2000. Black Cowboys of Texas. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.

where he offered me a seat and said, “So you wanna do a project about Black cowboys?” I said “Yes” and nervously waited for more questions to follow. He replied, “You ever been to West Texas?” I said “Yeah, my uncle lives in El Paso [and] I flew [there] once [to visit]. We drove that way on another trip [to Nevada].” He then asked me if I had seen any Black cowboys out that way on either of my trips. I don’t remember what my answer was, but I do remember feeling insulted and perceiving him to think that I was stupid. He told me that there *are* no Black cowboys in West Texas. Regarding Texas history, he told me that there *were* no Black cowboys.

It was not until I mentioned the book “Black Cowboys of Texas” and Alwyn Barr that he then turned to his computer which was sitting on a stand against the wall to his right. He pulled up two different websites that had information about Black cowboys and gave me an additional reference. As I write this, I have yet to understand why this educator, historian, scholar, and specialist on Texas history would tell me that there are no Black cowboys in West Texas nor are there Black cowboys in Texas’ history.

I had done my research on his work which has been published in a regional historical journal wherein he observes how memory is used to substitute history in the narratives of his own study’s participants about Texas borderlands and the cattle boom. Furthermore, he draws on Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s observation of “the silencing of descent.” Since then, even now, and probably as you are reading this, I feel torn between two hypotheses about this situation. I want to believe that he was testing me for some reason unknown to me and by “name dropping” a notable historian and perfectly titled book on the subject that I had “passed.” However, I can’t let go of the idea that had I not

known about Black cowboys outside of academic inquiry and demonstrated my knowledge of Black cowboys as (prominent) historical figures in Texas, I would have left his office doubting myself as a researcher and the validity of my study.

On the other hand, I felt like he intentionally withheld from me sources about Black's history in West Texas. Months later I shared this story with Ray who is a black rancher and one of my participants:

> Me: There's a history professor at [Texas] A&M that I went to talk to, because he's supposed to be someone who specializes in Texas… (Inaudible)…Texas… (Inaudible). He says, "so you wanna do a project about Black cowboys?"
>
> Ray: They throw that shit away…
>
> (G. 2013)

I was caught off guard and unprepared for Ray's response. It was as if I had asked him to describe the treatment of black experiences in United States in five words. "They throw that shit away…" captures the value of black experiences and, by extension, the treatment of black people in the United States. The American tradition of devaluing black lives is matched by silencing and erasing black experiences in ways that manifest in everyday experiences when a college student is asking for information about black people where history shows they were not present. These practices carry over into mainstream and popular culture where they fight for, over, and against the innocence of black boys at frontiers where their ability to fully mature into an adulthood is threatened by their personhood. Therefore, we should not "throw that shit away."

Imagine communities where little black boys are free to choose who and how they perform the racialized version of normalized masculinities they aspire to be (come). Of course, all of this, in an ideal world where "blackness" is not policed by *the –centrics*; Afro-centric and Eurocentric, and "masculinity" is not policed by the masculinist and feminist gatekeepers of social and cultural expressions. Imagine a historical moment in the U.S. where Black males were free to be cowboys and chase the "bad guy" as the law, while living above the law, which were the customary conventions of policing the "wild, wild" western borders of U.S. territory.

As cowboys, black men challenge 19th century paternalistic perceptions and stereotypes about ability and black being. The restricted visibility of blackness dressed up in western garb skews perceptions of race and makes the racialized cowboy a queer sight because he destabilizes notions of American masculinity. As cowboys, black men shift notions of belonging that are rooted in a sense of entitlement that comes from acquiring, or forcefully taking, land in the name of manifest destiny and the white man's burden to civilize the otherwise "uncivilized" Native Americans. All the while, as many of the participants in this study suggest, the character of black cowboys is one that desires to be entitled to ownership of the land on which he works to cultivate a livelihood of own for himself and his horses. Black cowboys' narratives of personal experiences within (Black) western culture offer reflexive insights that comment on popular and academic inquiries into notion of blackness, masculinity, and black masculinities.

These competing ideals are supported by particular understandings about race and masculinity in every day interactions and performances. When black cowboys "dress up" in their western attire— as ranchers, rodeo cowboys, and trail riders— their re-presentation may be understood as a sort of performance in drag. When I consider the ways that black cowboys fashion their embodiment, to look, sound, and *be* the ideal cowboy, the exaggerated performances of blackness, and a masculinity that seems to be that of the "other," reminds me of the way males "dress up" and perform a theatrical version of transgendered identities. By queering cis-gendered masculinity, black cowboys have the potential to expand commonsense notions of gender, blackness, and black masculinities.

Black Cowboys Today

During the time of U.S. industrial growth some working cowboys had to leave their rural homesteads and travel to entertain people as rodeo cowboys. This was the case for cowboys of any color. Some black cowboys, however, chose to take up "more civilized occupations" such as becoming train porters working for the U.S. railroad system (Nodjimbadem 2017). Somewhere during the process of inscribing and solidifying the American cowboy tale of masculinity, the likeness of "the original cowboy" was reimagined[2]. Decades later, we have contemporary black cowboys and communities of black cowboys who have maintained black western history and traditions passed down within their family. My (re)introduction to this community and

[2] This marks another point of departure that future research may detail as an exploration of black cowboys during The Great Migration.

the stories they had to share came on a sunny spring day of that same year. This day is what I consider my first "official" day of going back into my community as a researcher to gather stories that otherwise would not come up in everyday conversation. I drove three hours from College Station, Texas, on a Farm to Market road that felt like it was lined with tall trees for the entire trip, until I arrived at the Glover Legacy Rodeo in Madisonville, Texas.

After spending some time walking around taking pictures of the people and making notes of who I thought were cowboys and who would be part of the audience in the stands, I found myself back at the entrance of the sprawling acres of land where the rodeo was being held. I was introduced to a few members of the family who had been put to work manning the gate, taking entry fees, and directing people where to park. Smaller vehicles were directed to park on a plot of land close the rodeo arena while larger trucks that were pulling horse trailers were directed to park behind the pavilion. By this time, the traffic had subsided and they were standing around talking about the turnout, when I walked up.

After I was introduced, there was a little moment of silence as each person either looked down at the grass or up to the sky or looked over to the stands where the available seats were becoming scarce. It felt like a long time. Then, Melva looked at me and said, "They say it ain't no black cowboys." As we stood there with her uncle, nephews, daughter and father at the entrance of the County Fairgrounds, where she was hosting the first annual family legacy rodeo, her father, a legendary cowboy who many people familiarly refer to as "Glover," started to tell stories about generations of (black)

cowboys in their family. We were all listening and I thought to myself, “I knew I knew better than to believe what *they* say when I’ve seen and known black cowboy almost all my life.” This matter-of-fact revelation ironically and at once made the marked cowboy’s invisibility visible.

In the contemporary moment, Black Cowboys are a bricolage of subcultural manifestations that are not commonly associated with or thought of as intersecting, because of their corresponding associations to performances of “race” types. The way black cowboys employ signifiers of "blackness" within western cultural practices transforms the cultural image of the unmarked cowboy into a bricolage of cultural aesthetics. The variety of ways in which different African-Americans perform blackness demonstrates how black Cowboys conceive the role of race in western social history. This diversity among a relatively small number of professional (black) rodeo cowboys creates a stark contrast to how each man reads the racialized performance of another (black) cowboy as a representation of the "type" of man that person is. These assessments consider someone’s reading of another black masculinity against his self-perception as well as perceptions of white masculinities commonly associated with the cowboy figure and iconography.

Regional influences on identity construction run deeper than fantastic notions about a black cowboy that plays to the stereotypical tropes of blackness and the blank canvas that, for now, exists until those voices articulate the tropes of a cowboy who is black. Consider the following: that there is an established ideal about the roles and responsibilities of cowboys in the West and a specific way that he performs masculinity.

Absent representations of black folks in the west, where might we expect black cowboys to draw on their knowledge about blackness? Well, a social interaction guided by the history of race(ism) in different regions of the United States exemplifies how southern black people are not like northern black people. Similarly, the literature on race relations in the United States disproportionately focuses on race relations between the U.S. North and the U.S. South. I find that black cowboys' notions about the roles and place of blackness in U.S. society is rooted in the history and lived experiences of black people in the U.S. South where the northerners perceived the people and the culture of the South as backwards.

The problem is that black cowboy identities are at odds with the archive of material used to construct a master narrative about race and masculinity/manhood through national iconography (imagery/representations). However, black cowboys have passed down stories of personal experiences that teach lessons about black masculinity despite their identities being at odds with conventional representations of American masculinity in the American West. Personal experiences, legends, anecdotes and jokes are other ways black cowboys teach lessons about being "western" as a black man. More specifically these forms of folklore demonstrate how they understand the way notions of black masculinity are at odds with the archive and how they address these misconceptions.

The challenge that arises when discussing performances of black masculinity divorced from notions of race is how to place the only salient difference between the racialized masculinity of one man and another. Culturally formulated notions of

racialized performances of masculinity are deemed deviant at either extreme when polarized by the individual's cultural compass which points to what they consider "normal" for the group. Claiming a national representation for one ethnic group and not another is a matter of naming, based on notions of ownership and belonging rooted in power manifested in the value of artifacts. Claiming ownership of western artifacts as a valuable form of capital allows one group to represent that icon in their likeness as the face of the nation and thereby the standard.

Marking black cowboys as different from the whole of the folk group based on racialized masculinity results in distortions of the way we understand blackness and racialized masculinity. The ideological disconnect between "blackness" and who can be *black* in America intersecting with representations of national culture poses a challenging for thinking through multiple masculinities. Similarly, mainstream ideals about types of masculinities represented by national iconographic figures, like the cowboy, become challenging to use to think through diversity among black people, black experiences and what constitutes black cultural practices in the U.S.

Mainstream culture would suggest that Black people can't be the hero and the villain at the same time. Black actors can hardly get a role where they are depicted as the hero. Black is not viewed or represented as heroic because it is used to represent the villain – the dark side— and all the other metaphors and negative stereotypes. The role of black cowboys and how to read their embodiment gets complicated when deconstructing a figure that is the hero and the villain and is responsible for policing

borders facilitating the expansion of a territory that's something that's heavily dictated historians

As the master narrative goes, black males are categorically resigned to playing the role opposite white males. Where the white male and his heroic masculinity is the hero, despite his ability to be the law and the "outlaw," black males are the villain which is somehow different from being the "outlaw." Therefore, exploring black masculinity among black cowboys is also an exercise in humanizing the historically dehumanized social identities of black males. By doing this I demonstrate how to approach understandings of black masculinities, and masculinity in general, that does not require in depth or detailed considerations of sexuality but can be framed using feminist, gender, and queer theories of masculinity which have traditionally been used to help hypersexualize and promote the image of a cis-gendered beast like the history of mainstream propaganda spreading the myth of "black male beast."

The ways that unmarked patriarchy influences the social life of black cowboys in the contemporary moment becomes clear by critically analyzing social interactions and narratives of black cowboys. Some of the themes that come up when discussing blackness are respectability, code switching (a performative), and honor. Gender, on the other hand, raises questions about the effects of patriarchy, male privilege, and (socio-economic) class. The experiences of black cowboys in a predominantly white subcultural world should produce interesting manifestations of blackness and masculinity. First, let's look at what black cowboys are saying about race in general and blackness. Second, we will look at how black cowboys embody what they say it means

to be black. For example, styles of dress that play with conventional cowboys looks, use of language to play with terminology and informal codes of how to interact with outsiders, or white people in the western world.

The Annual Fall Round Up

"Hi," I said with a smile, my hands clasped together in front of me as an invisible shield that, to me, masked my nervousness and excitement about the stories that I would collect at this event. I was walking towards the entrance of a Catholic Church located in what was considered a predominantly black parish in Houston's "Third Ward"[3]. "Hey there! Glad, you could make it," a man said to me as he was trying to balance aluminum pans of precooked meatballs, bags of decorations and the door to the church's school where the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo's Black Heritage Committee was hosting its annual "Fall Round Up."

I went to grab the door so that he would have both hands to carry food that I was excited to taste, and therefore did not want him to drop, and the bags with decorations to transform the auditorium into a western themed event. I was mid reach for the door handle when he said, "Go ahead," pointing the way with a nod of his head, "I got it." I could see that he most certainly did not have it but, southern hospitality, respectability, and his responsibility as a gentleman wouldn't let him let me help him. So, I said "Thank you" as I walked through the door and stood just on the other side just in case those pans of food needed saving. I asked him one last time "Are you sure you got it?" "Yeah, I can

[3] The parish system is no longer in use, however, the naming conventions remained long after the parishes were dissolved in favor of counties.

manage. Go on in the auditorium, there's a few people here already and the band is setting up on stage. We gon have live music this year." "Alright," I said conceding to his determination to do it all by himself.

"I wonder where they get that from," I thought to myself, as I made my way to the kitchen to see if anyone there needed help setting up. I had arrived early, which was right on time according to the event flyer, but I figured why not start some conversations and learn some things until more people arrive. I walked into the kitchen to find a woman looking flustered as she searched through different drawers and cabinets for utensils. "Do you need help with anything?" I asked. I must have startled her because she looked surprised as she quickly turned to see who was there. "No, I got it. But have

Figure 1. Decorations at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo's Black Heritage Committee Annual Fall Round Up

Figure 2. Poster of the Black Heritage Committee's Annual Fall Round Up

you see a man around here with my pans of meatballs?" I smiled and said "Yeah, I passed him as I was coming into the building. He'll be here in a minute." She seemed to be half interested in my response as she had already gone back to looking through drawers and cabinets.

I walked out of the kitchen and into the auditorium where people were decorating chairs and tables, the band was setting up their equipment and a few members of the organization were just sitting around watching everything come together. Tonight's festivities were about networking, fellowship, and raising money for scholarships. For me, this was an opportunity to see a different aspect of the way black western culture was represented and promoted through education and service. I continued to walk

around the auditorium taking pictures of the space, the decorations, and the people in their western wear – nothing you would actually wear to do horse or cattle work in – and talking to different people. I noticed that many of the attendees were donors and supporters of the cause for promoting higher education for minority students.

Most of the conversations I had were short and were initiated by the attendees who wanted to know who I was and what I was doing there. I wasn't exactly dressed in western themed clothes but I'm sure the look of anxious excitement, notepad, and vigorous note taking made me standout as an "outsider." After making introductions and describing my research, everyone who stopped me was interested in helping me, or at least offering a reference from a secondary source. A lot of the information that was suggested to me were book references like "Black Cowboys of Texas" and film references like "Posse" and "Blazing Saddles." I wondered why this was offered instead of referrals to black ranchers or other trail ride organizations or an invite to their property. Later one of the cowboys, who is also a member of this committee but was not in attendance, shared with me that the people I was talking to were "political cowboys."

He said that they couldn't tell me the first thing about cowboyin' but they could give me plenty of books to read about *real* cowboys. He placed emphasis on the word "real."

While I was at the Annual Fall Round Up, I was told to introduce myself to a representative of the Houston chapter of the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum (BSNM). Members of the BSNM are, according to their missions statement, "dedicated primarily to preserving the legacy and honor of the African-American soldier in defense of the United States of America from the Revolutionary War to present (Buffalo Soldier Museum Houston, TX | African American Military Museum | Buffalo Soldiers National Museum n.d.)." During my conversation with a member of the BSNM at the Fall Round Up, he referred me to another member of the BSNM, a sergeant, who served in the

Figure 3. Members of the Black Heritage Committee dressed in western wear (cowboy hats and boots with long-sleeve collared shirt and wrangler jeans)

Vietnam War, who then referred me to a Captain who also served in the Vietnam War. The Captain was not at the "Fall Round Up" but I was given a business card and told to call the Buffalo Soldier's Museum for an appointment. The Sergeant said that if I ran into any issues gaining access that I should give his name to the receptionist.

I was not sure why I had been referred to the Buffalo Soldiers Museum for information about Black cowboys. While I was there I made some connections and was reminded of lessons about framing identities for representation to a general audience. During my conversation with the Captain, it becomes clear that I was trying to make some sense of the connection between Black cowboys and Buffalo Soldiers. For me, race was an obvious factor and I knew that Buffalo Soldiers used horses, but that was the extent of my connection. I held on to the idea that "not every man with a horse is a cowboy." Nonetheless, I was sent to the Buffalo Soldiers Museum and I was determined to understand the possible connection that the "political cowboy" who referred me to the Captain seemed to be making.

The rest of my time spent at the Fall Round Up was spent taking pictures and notes of conversations in passing. By this time, the auditorium was full of people, presentations of new members were being made, people were being honored as distinguished members of the organization, and scholarships were being awarded. After official business was over, the party began and it just wasn't ideal for formal or informal interviewing.

The next day, I called the Houston Buffalo Soldiers Museum to schedule an interview and was told that it was best to just show up to the museum and find out what I

wanted to know. I said, “Thank you,” put the museum’s address in the GPS on my cell phone and left my house headed north towards a historically African American neighborhood to make connections between black cowboys and Buffalo Soldiers. When I arrived at the Buffalo Soldiers Museum I was greeted with a smile by an African American woman who I assumed was the person who took my call to schedule a meeting with someone from the museum. I introduced myself and learned that the Capitan was finishing a tour but he would be with me shortly. I waited no more than 10 minutes before Captain Matthews greeted me in the lobby of the museum and escorted me to a large room to the right of the front desk, where we started talking about how the military represented an opportunity for upward mobility for black people.

After the interview, I recognized how my attempts to explore the possible link between Buffalo Soldiers and Black cowboys, versus his point to explain the benefits of military service for black males, is one manifestation of the on-going negotiation of meaning based our individual focus on different aspects of culture. This exchange is one of many moments where I was reminded of how defining cultural identities is in no way an intuitive process. In a different kind of way, this interview demonstrates how the nature of defining identities through cultural practices and material culture is situational and dependent upon discursive processes and practices. Together we created a new way of framing an identity so that the other person could see a different vision for the way that identity may be framed in relationship to different social or cultural contexts.

After I explained my interests in sorting out why I was referred to his museum when I was doing a project about Black cowboys, Captain Matthews started the

conversation with some background information about the way black people view the military and the history of blacks in the military[4]. During the interview, he explained that

> The military, in the Black community, has always been thought of very highly. And I think the uh the precedence was set with Frederick Douglas. You know he said at the beginning of the Civil War "you give the colored man a uniform, a buckle with the U.S. on it, a button with an eagle on it and a musket, and you'll make him a citizen, but you'll also make him a man. 'Cause what he was trying to do was make sure the Civil War was being fought for freedom and not just to save The Union. And the only way you can do that, gave the Black man a blue uniform. And I can show you a picture of that particular saying. You know I kind of paraphrased it. But I think that set the precedence in the Black community. And the same thing was said in World War I. (W.E.B.) DuBois and the famous Crisis Magazine article, he said "put aside your differences, go overseas, come back, be first class citizens[5]." World War II was the same thing; they said it a little differently. They said "Double D for victory. Victory against Axis in Europe, victory against racism at home." And so, that phenomena of being in the army and the military being popular in the Black community went

[4] A number of our contributors have elected to use pseudonyms. For whatever reason they have elected to use the alias in making their contributions to this research, I do not question. I respect their decision to do so. And I am also respect their privacy.

> all the way through until you got to Vietnam. Vietnam was a little different because it wasn't as popular.

While I appreciated this foundation because it speaks to Black's desire to be seen as full citizens and respected by U.S. society it did not get me closer to an understanding of the connection between the black cowboys and the Buffalo Soldiers. One opportunity that I missed during this exchange is an explanation of how black people, as the manual labor that built this country and helped to expand its territory was not enough to end their status as second-class citizens in the U.S. I was starting to put together the shift from slave labor to Buffalo Soldiers as the transferable skills being glossed over in addition to the naming of "cowboys" as such during that time. I thought that back then, horseback was one of the primary sources of transportation. From here, my question became why this is significant if everyone was riding horses. In "The Lesser-Known History of African-American Cowboys," an article published in the Smithsonian online magazine, staff reporter Katie Nodjimbadem locates the

> cowboy lifestyle [coming] into its own in Texas, which had been cattle country since it was colonized by Spain in the 1500s. But cattle farming did not become the bountiful economic and cultural phenomenon recognized today until the late 1800s, when millions of cattle grazed in Texas (Nodjimbadem 2017).

She goes on to say that:

> By 1825, slaves accounted for nearly 25 percent of the Texas settler population. By 1860, fifteen years after it became part of the Union, that

number had risen to over 30 percent—that year's census reported 182,566 slaves living in Texas. As an increasingly significant new slave state, Texas joined the Confederacy in 1861. Though the Civil War hardly reached Texas soil, many white Texans took up arms to fight alongside their brethren in the East. While Texas ranchers fought in the war, they depended on their slaves to maintain their land and cattle herds. In doing so, the slaves developed the skills of cattle tending (breaking horses, pulling calves out of mud and releasing longhorns caught in the brush, to name a few) that would render them invaluable to the Texas cattle industry in the post-war era (Nodjimbadem 2017).

This history made me feel like the Captain and I needed to go back in time a little further so, I asked him:

MB: But was it the use of horses that [was] the main difference between all those other wars?

Captain Matthews: Ah well the horses stopped at uh World War I.

Myeshia: So then why are they putting Black men on horses [before World War I]?

Captain Matthews: oh well they all were on horses. It wasn't just they had Black men. The problem was that they usually had the worse horses. So, as a matter of fact, uh, during the Indian Wars, right after the Civil War the Black units got the leftover equipment. You know, even General Custer had his commission with the 10th Cavalry. He refused to go. Said that

Black men wouldn't fight. And it was almost 10 years to the day that he was wiped out at the Little Bighorn in 1876.

Myeshia: It's one thing to give African-Americans a uniform and then manhood and citizenship comes along with that identity, but whose role was it to train and deal with horses in that way? Were Black folks doing that before then or were they just…

Captain Matthews: Oh yeah, I mean cowboys, African-American and Native Americans and Mexican, uh Spanish. Uh, I think the thing that you can make as a significant part of the army or the military as it relates to Black people is that it was the only place where Blacks would really advance and demonstrate patriotism, leadership, uh, you couldn't do it right after the Civil War or anywhere else because if you were Black in America, in the Southern states, prior to the Civil War you were basically doing four things: picking cotton, cutting sugar cane, working tobacco fields, working on rice patties. Guess what you were doing after the Civil War? Picking cotton, and cutting sugar cane, none of that changed. But in the military, there was an opportunity.

Myeshia: As far as the disconnect though, 'cause before [the Civil War] there were only four things and none of them involved horses, according to history. Who taught these people how to care for and deal with the animals?

Captain Matthews: The horses? Oh yeah, well they learned that you know on the plantations on the farms you know 'cause they were doing the work.

This narrative means to challenge notions of who came first and, in the contemporary moment, the idea that Black cowboys are mimicking popular cultural imagery. The social history of roles played by Afro-descended slaves who broke the horses and tended to the cattle that belonged to plantation owners are things that define the cowboy as rancher and "hand," or all-around cowboy in the rodeo arena. However, contemporary commonsense notions of the cowboy evoke the image of a man who looks more like John Wayne than Isom Dart or William “Bill” Pickett[6][7].

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[6] Ned Huddleston (also known as Isom Dart) was born into slavery in Arkansas in 1849. His reputation as a rider, roper and bronco-buster earned him the nicknames of the “Black Fox” and the “Calico Cowboy.” He was also a notorious Wyoming Territory outlaw. In 1861 twelve-year-old Huddleston accompanied his owner, a Confederate officer, into Texas during the Civil War. After being freed at the end of the war Huddleston headed for the southern Texas-Mexico border region where he found work at a rodeo, became a stunt rider and honed his skills as a master horseman.

Huddleston straddled both sides of the law. For a time he and a young Mexican bandit named Terresa survived as rustlers stealing horses in Mexico and selling them in Texas. Huddleston later joined a cattle drive heading northwest to Brown’s Hole in the Colorado-Wyoming area around 1871. The 6’2” Huddleston briefly found success mining gold and silver then claimed his partner cheated him out of his earnings. After a tumultuous love affair with a Shoshone Indian woman in 1875, Huddleston joined the infamous Tip Gault Gang, a cattle and horse rustling outfit of southeastern Wyoming. After narrowly escaping death he went further west and started a new life as a hard-working man. He changed his name to Isom Dart and made a living as a bronco buster.

Isom Dart later returned to Brown’s Hole around 1890 and established his own ranch, but local cattlemen suspected he had built up his ranch herd from cattle he’d rustled from their ranches. The ranchers hired the notorious range detective, Tom Horn, to punish Dart. Horn ambushed and killed Isom Dart on October 3, 1900 near Brown's Hole. Public opinion was (and continues to be) divided about Dart's guilt. Some Brown's Hole residents mourned his death, claiming Dart was killed by cattleman who wanted his land and cattle. They saw Dart as a good-hearted, talented horseman and a top bronc stomper. Others believed he never completely relinquished his life of cattle rustling and thus remained a menace to the community (Wagner 2007-2017).

[7] William Pickett was born on this date in 1870. He was a legendary cowboy of Black and Indian descent. Bill Pickett, the second of 13 children, began his career as a cowboy while in grade school. Pickett soon began giving exhibitions of his roping, riding, and bulldogging skills, passing a hat for donations. By 1888, his family had moved to Taylor, Texas, and Bill performed in the town's first fair that year. He and his brothers started a horse-breaking business in Taylor, and he was a member of the National Guard and a deacon of the Baptist church.

He signed on with the 101 Ranch show in 1905, becoming a full-time ranch employee in 1907. Soon he

Myeshia: ‘Cause it's not like they’re just a means of transportation, they could also be seen as a means of escape. So, there has to be something that explains the before and after because there aren’t any narratives about Black cowboys which I think is part of why I was sent here. Black folks weren’t in the fields and then, all of a sudden, they’re on these horses fighting for the U.S.

Captain Matthews: But I think they were…I think they did know about horses and cows and things before because they did the work it wasn’t the master that was out in the field that’s breaking the horse and milking the cows, they did do that. It was the field hand. And the field hands were Black people and so I mean that’s what made them even better soldiers than the cavalry soldiers because you had two types you had infantry and cavalry.

Myeshia: That in-between space is what I’m trying to figure out as far as the history and the lack of narrative about that. As far as most people they think of

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moved his wife and children to Oklahoma. From 1905 to 1931, the 101 Ranch Wild West Show was one of the great shows in the country. The 101 Ranch Show introduced bulldogging (steer wrestling), an event invented by Bill Pickett, one of the show's stars. Riding his horse, Spradley, Pickett came alongside a Longhorn steer, dropped to the steer's head, twisted its head toward the sky, and bit its upper lip to get full control. Cowdogs of the Bulldog breed were known to bite the lips of cattle to subdue them. This was how Pickett's technique got the name "bulldogging."

He later performed in Canada, Mexico, South America, England. He became the first black cowboy movie star. Had he not been banned from competing with White rodeo contestants, Pickett might have become one of the greatest record-setters in his sport. He was often identified as an Indian or some ethnic background other than black to be allowed to compete. Bill Pickett died in 1932, after he was kicked in the head by a horse. Famed humorist Will Rogers announced the funeral of his friend on his radio show. His grave is on what is left of the 101 Ranch near Ponca City, Oklahoma.

In 1989, years after being honored by the National Rodeo Hall of Fame, Pickett was inducted into the Pro-rodeo Hall of Fame and Museum of the American Cowboy at Colorado Springs, Colorado. Bill Pickett is also in the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City (Katz 2000-2013).

John Wayne you know the white cowboys and that's what you see on TV. And I think…how do you go from the plantation and being kept away from all means of transportation, from tryin' to escape be it by horse train or otherwise and all of a sudden you're fighting for your country on an animal that is potentially dangerous.

Captain Matthews: yeah, you know that's a joke that I use with the seniors. So, if you were traveling from San Antonio, Texas to El Paso, Texas between 1866 and 1876 and you were pinned down by the outlaws, you know the bad guys, who would most likely come to your rescue? And I'd give 'em multiple choice. A.) Somebody from the 9th or 10th cavalry, which were the Buffalo Soldiers B.) John Wayne. And so, if you're over the age of 60 and you grew up with John Wayne and you know and it just wasn't true. The vast majority of the people that protected you between 1866 and 1876 in West Texas were Black People. They were the Buffalo Soldiers because they had 'em all through all the forts and posts throughout West Texas. The men in blue were Black[8].

(M. 2013)

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[8] Organized in 1869 after consolidation of two other Black units, 38th and 41st Infantry Regiments. For more than twenty years, the unit occupied military posts in the southwest, protecting and maintaining peace on the turbulent frontier. In addition to battle engagements, the members of the regiment built roads, guarded stage stations, constructed and repaired telegraph lines, guarded waterholes, and escorted supply trains, survey parties, freight wagons and mail coaches, as well as performing scouting patrols (Buffalo Soldier Museum Houston, TX | African American Military Museum | Buffalo Soldiers National Museum n.d.).

This interview offers a possible link between Black males, horses, manhood, citizenship, and belonging which differs from accounts about how Blacks became interested in becoming cowboys through the influence of popular culture and characters like John Wayne. The Captain's version of U.S. history considers how Black men were using horses for a specific purpose in the military and this also brings up the irony in Melva saying that "it ain't no black cowboys." In the context of her revelation, I was standing amid three generations of black cowboys (and cowgirls) discussing how and why "they say it ain't no black cowboys."

Somewhere in the official narrative of western history there was a silencing of voices and narratives that outlined the trajectory of the "original" contemporary (Black) cowboy. Glover also echoed some of the ideas I had after meeting with the Capitan at the Buffalo Soldiers Museum but he talked about the Glover family's history in that part of Texas. His grandfather used to work that land for a white family and when he got out of school he would help with work. After some time, his grandfather was able to buy that land and it became their family homestead.

Figure 4. Picture of a man dressed in a Buffalo Soldier uniform at the Black Heritage Committee's Annual Fall Round Up

In the interview, Captain Matthews mentioned that during slavery black men performed various roles as they labored over agricultural tasks such as breaking horses and taking care of the livestock on plantations across the U.S. South. Over time, these roles evolved to become associated with western character types, or tropes. Some of these tropes would become the basis of negative stereotypical roles that African Americans would be portrayed as in the media. However, the cowboy, as a western character type, was created while enslaved Black folks worked on farms and ranches performing the same tasks that contemporary cowboys use to define what it means to be a cowboy. What we are talking about are the defining characteristics of an identity that, at this point in history, has yet to be labeled but that many of my participants have come to share as an origins story of where the term "cowboy" came from. Meanwhile, as racialized stereotypes were being ascribed, gendered stereotypes also shifted in ways that focused on masculine types and representations.

Cowboys are a Special Breed: Defining Black Cowboys in the Contemporary Moment

The complexity and variety of ways people define the term "cowboy" manifests in many ways for those who are active participants in western cultural practices. In one instance, historical versus contemporary notions about who is and who is not a cowboy suggests a strict dichotomy between "traditional" and "modern." Alternately, lived experiences teach us that life is never simply black and white, and to understand people's changing notions about identities requires a look at the space and time between "us" and "them" as well as "then" and "now."

The important thing to keep in mind is that cowboy culture is broadly defined by and through the positionality of the horse. Moving beyond intuitive definitions of the term "cowboy," and beyond the limited scope of this project into more interpretive notions, we can reasonably question if riding instructors, farriers, jockeys, racehorse trainers, or horse breeders are cowboys. However, there are some ranchers who participate in rodeo competitions and trailrides just as some trailriders participate in rodeo competitions. Not all cowboys are farmers and/or ranchers just like not all rodeo cowboys and trailriders discretely practice and experience their respective western cultural practices. For example, some cowboys use horses, as material culture, to perform labor for farming and ranching- a tool- in the means of production. Rodeo cowboys' use of horses for work to perform at a competitive standard is another example of differing horse positionalities. Conversely, while some cowboys use horses for farm and ranch work, others use horses for competition or sport. There is a third cowboy "type" whose use of the horse is more symbolic. Trailriders whose claim to the title "cowboy" is contested by ranchers and rodeo cowboys, use horses for "play," as opposed to work.

Figure 5 Calf being taken out to the pasture with the other cows and their calves.

Figure 6 Ray thinking about how this calf is going to be received by the others after its mom dies out in the pasture

Historical depictions of the "cowboy," and by extension definitions of the character type, demonstrate a particular "type" of male. For example, Jacqueline M. Moore states that "the masculine cowboy hero depicted in film and literature is usually a figure straddling the frontier between civilization and the wilderness, sometimes siding with the townspeople against the wilderness and sometimes with the equally mythical, noble, Indian savage against civilization (Moore 2009: 15)." By illustrating the way the cowboy figure is defined and represented in popular media, Moore describes how "the [news] paper also participated in the cult of the cowboy hero, painting the men of the Wild West as manly heroes and perfect gentleman (Moore 2009: 232)."

To some, these historical accounts of "cowboy" identities in the media conspicuously neglect to inform readers that, among the ranks of (white, unmarked) cowboys, there were Black cowboys. For at least 35 years of United States history, as the title of the book Cow Boys and Cattle Men: Class and Masculinities on the Texas Frontier, 1865-1900 (2009) suggests, the cowboy as an American hero and "perfect gentleman" was celebrated, emulated and he was, above all, not (re-presented as) Black.

Moore also identifies conflicting notions among (white) cowboys about who is and who is not a "real" cowboy in the 1920s. These debates about an authentic "cowboy" identity arose during a time in United States history when mainstream notions about who were cowboys had taken a turn towards having undesirable traits. Moore explains:

> debates in the 1920s about 'the real cowboy' usually involved former cowboys (or cowboy admirers) objecting to overly rough or crude

> depiction of them as scoundrels. These defenses of the cowboy stressed his chivalry and code of honor and, often, his education and refinement. Old-time cowboys complained that rodeo cowboys were not 'real' cowboys because they drank and caroused with women too much, and had bad work habits such as quitting the ranch on a whim to follow the rodeos. Similarly, rodeo cowboys claimed they were cowboys because, aside from the roping and riding skills, they dressed and spoke like cowboys and followed a 'cowboy code' which included all the mythical ideals of chivalry (2009: 381).

Characterizations of cowboys like the ones depicted above are only one aspect of how cowboys may be defined or depicted. Historical literature and popular depictions of cowboys as symbolic of particular masculine identities is significantly broadened when my participant's responses consider the question "Who are cowboys?" And "What does it mean to be a cowboy?" Contemporary notions among Black cowboys who take part in western culture gives pause to common sense notions and full acceptance of historical

definitions for “the cowboy” as they are applied in the present.

Figure 7 After arriving at Ray's new property he discovers one of his pregnant cows is down

Figure 8 The two cowboys discuss their thoughts on whether or not she will die and what

Figure 9 J.R. is trying to encourage this pregnant cow get up but she is too weak.

Figure 10 The two cowboys question whether or not she will survive.

Figure 11 J.R. trying to help the weak cow to her feet.

Figure 12The two cowboys decide to try, unsuccessfully, to help the cow get on her feet.

Figure 13 After repeated attempts to help this cow she is too tired to keep trying to get up.

Figure 14 The two cowboys drug the dying cow to the back of the property as I stood watching from a distance. Eventually, I learned that the cow and unborn calf would eventually die.

Masculinity, in the [black] western world is defined through particular types of labor performed by men using the horse as a tool. The juxtaposition of the labor performed by "real" cowboys versus the "*work*" done by trail riders reveals notions of masculinity rooted in a language of ability. For example, many of the definitions for the term "cowboy," which were provided to me by different cowboys, describe specific types of work and point to the sentiment that "real men do this." Trail riders typically interact with their horse for pleasure riding in, what looks more like a parade than a trail ride. During a trail ride these pleasure riders, who are typically members of a social club organized around horses, spend about four hours dealing with their horse during one trail riding weekend.

Trailriding organization structure stems from an Association. The Association is where the person(s) wanting to start a club write the bylaws needed to create their own club and pay their monthly dues as a club. Clubs require membership and charge dues to help fund club events. Each club has a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. There are also independent clubs (or clubs that do not belong to an association).

Independent clubs are more challenging to organize but there still is a hierarchy per se, because each is different. Each trail-riding club has a minimum of two events per year. There is an annual "king and queen dance" and a trail ride . The money collected by the club is used to meet association guideline. In addition, each club has a calendar and throughout the year, everybody in a club (which is part of a larger association) goes to a trail ride and event to support the other clubs in their association. To show support

and in turn gain support, each club will send members to represent their club at another club's event. However, Ray warned me.

Ray: Now everybody say they a cowboy ain't no damn cowboy.

Myeshia: I'm seeing it.

Ray: Just 'cause you got a horse, and know how to get up on him and wear some jeans don't make you no cowboy…

Myeshia: What make you a cowboy?

Ray: I done this for you already.

Myeshia: Yeah, but yuh answer, you done it twice, you gave a different answer both times. So, that's fine im'a take 'em all.

Ray: Well, instead [of] that hat an' them fancy boots, im'a tell you it's what's inside.

Myeshia: Why do people wanna be able to call they self a cowboy?

Ray: You see what I do all day…

Well, You got cowboys that are arena cowboys, but… and the hands they can do it all, they can do both. But, uh, for the most part, those guys that are callin' they self "cowboys" that are on the Trail rides talkin' bout they cowboy this an' cain't even spell cowboy they ain't a patch on a cowboy ass.

It really don't make a difference to me, I could care less. They can call they self "cowboys" all they want to. They ain't nothing that… I mean, I don't…. They can call they self "cowboys" from here on out for tomorrow, it don't bother me one bit. But you know, a lot of cowboys, they take

offense to that. If you call 'em- the real cowboys- a Trail rider, you got a fight on yuh hands. You got a serious fight on yuh hands.

Myeshia: So, then what are you saying?

Ray: If you walk up to a P.R.C.A. [Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association] cowboy and call him a trail… "hey Trail rider"- them fightin' words…literally. If he don't fight you his girlfriend gon fight yuh. That's like you sayin' "hey bitch," that's a slap in the face. And they know it. You might not know it, but you know real cowboys know that's just like a slap in the face.

Myeshia: So, you gotta earn that

Ray: Oh yeah, you gotta earn it. It ain't nothing given. How many nights you think they've stayed up deliverin' a calf, pullin' a calf out of a mamma in the field, or having to bottle feed a calf for a week stayin' up all night and make sure he live. Not ever. Not never. How many times you think they'd do it? Not never. 'Cause they've never been taught they don't know that. They call 'em cow-boys for a reason.

Myeshia: Why?

Ray: They mess with cows…and…back in the days it was the Black guys that took care of the cows but they call 'em cowboys "them cowboys comin" that's who really did the work

Myeshia: So, cowboys….

Ray: They called us "boy"

Myeshia: If that was a derogatory term for the white boy to call Blacks, then when do you think they took it on?

Ray: Well it got glorified in the midst of the 1800s on down. It got glorified. Cowboys were special.

Myeshia: Why?

Ray: It takes a special breed to be a cowboy. Everybody cain't do this shit, not all day every day. You got to love it, you cain't just like it, you got to love it. You gotta feed cows, check fence…its 900 thangs to do and you cain't like this you got to love it with a passion. I may not get home till 9 o'clock. I gotta wait on some guys…normally I'm in the bed, I may not be sleep but I'm in the bed, by 8 between 7/8 but you know any given night I may be out here till 9 o'clock huntin' coyotes.

(G. 2013)

"Trail riding," says one of the Trail riders I spoke to, "is not about the horses." He explained to me that:

> In one weekend, you will spend about 5-6 hours dealing with your horse from going to the barn, loading up, driving to the trail ride, taking the horse out of the trailer, rope off and on the day of the ride you will spend about 3-5 hours with your horse. It's all about social gathering, the party, the music, the dancing. Trail riding is a community in itself and trail riding is a way of life. It's all about support. The whole basis of trail riding is about support and to show love. Each club helps to entice individual members to

> attend events. They will have contests like, "most members in uniform/ most riders;" "most riders on horseback," “furthest distance traveled," and more recently the category of "crunkest party wagon (2 years)" or how hard you party on your party wagon and some clubs will make up their own categories (January 18, 2013).

This trail rider’s account of a weekend trail ride and camping out casts a different image of what a cowboy is and what cowboys may do. Real cowboys, and by extension, real men, perform a labor of cultivation with their horses and these efforts define that man as a working man who is therefore not “a lazy black man.” The latter does not acknowledge the use of the horse by the former as laboring for the cultivation of resources and the efficacy of black male identities in American national culture, nor do “real” cowboys value the practice of trail riding as work.

The way social roles and positionality influence how racialized gender identities are experienced and performed gives further insight into black males who are completely immersed in rodeo and western activities. Whether the perception of racism by blacks is restricted to acts against whites or includes the ability to be racist against other blacks is also unclear. However, the positionality of a black male in a dominantly white male rodeo organization is only one framing device. A closer look at the implicit relationships made between race and maleness may suggest the belief that racism does occur in the rodeo world despite expressions like “there are no black cowboy or white cowboys [there are] just cowboys.”

For some black cowboys, the (e)valuation of their difference – their "blackness"— is a source of pride, for others it is a viewed as something that they "just happen to be," and then there are black cowboys who are said to reject their blackness much like the historical "Uncle Tom" figure. I noticed that whether the cowboys I spoke with chose to be proud of their "blackness" or were unaware of their own signifying practices, there are some ideological disconnects between what they say it means to be black and how being a cowboy affects notions of racialized gender identities.

Contemporary black cowboys embody this knowledge in their personal experiences, conversations, jokes, and folktales. The irony is that there are statements like "they say it ain't no black cowboys," and "the forgotten history of" when there are marginalized groups whose ethnic identity is at odds with the archive of cultural material used to construct a particularly homogenous master narrative. It may seem peculiar to discuss masculinity and the glory of male privilege in the context of marginalized peoples. This is where it becomes useful to think through these peculiar notions and the function of race and gender as two social-cultural forces impacting individuals who identify at the intersection of black and masculine.

Conclusion

This is a project about how experiences shape identity and ways that a sense of communal belonging, based on shared identities, inform the way black cowboys see their selves and interact with others as processes of identity negotiation. Many of the black cowboys in this study had some turning point in their life that instigated a conscious negotiation and manipulation of different racial or gender codes and rules as

they promote upward mobility for their selves and their group. The significance of the project and reason it is possible is an attempt to push social science into the realm of everyday interactions that influence the way we choose to study cultural interaction and the way we choose to be reflective about how what we choose to study to advance knowledge and solve human problems.

By demonstrating the knowledge that I have about the topic, my research questions will legitimize the project from the perspective of my informants. Participation in venues for horse maintenance, training, and competitions will facilitate rapport building with black cowboys. In the context of a researcher, engaging black cowboys on the topic of race and gender prepared with specific research goals is different from participating as someone with some experience with horses and cowboys. Yet, both perspectives will allow me to engage my research question and my informants in nuanced, and specific, ways that will contribute to answering my broader research question; how do black men transmit cultural information about masculinity through black Western cultural practices?

Patriarchy, as a traditional system of power between the sexes operates concurrently with racial hierarchies in the United States. As two traditional systems of domination via power and marginalization, race and gender hierarchies produce interesting disconnects as scientific racism posits "logical," scientifically proven evidence for racial superiority and inferiority in the contemporary moment (Fairchild 1991). Black males embody the power that comes from male privilege while phenotypes, or the outward expressions of genetic make-ups, betray gender privilege at

the marginalization of race for African-Americans. In the context of this study, the mechanisms, or tactics, that Black cowboys use to "make-do" in a broader social system with strategies that maintain the social order that informs race and gender hierarchies as mutually exclusive are considered progressive (de Certeau 2002).

This project will contribute to the discourse surrounding masculinity as it is interpreted within feminist theoretical frameworks, similar to the way gender studies disproportionately focuses on women and the construction of femininity and womanhood in relation to masculinity. More specifically, this project contributes African-American's manifestations of the anthropological theories informed by notions about the dominant culture in the United States and contributes the multi-vocality of African-Americans' perspectives to the social history of the Unites States in the context of broader relations on individual experiences in the U.S. South. My use of black cowboy culture as a cultural space that is full of signs and symbols representative of black culture and masculinity, acts as components of a social organism that functions to express the ideas of marginalized individuals.

Considering additional social-cultural characteristics such as class further complicates the dichotomy that males and females are socialized to perform. There is a general sense of multiple masculinities which is discussed in terms of cowboy types that are embodied and rooted in notions of work versus labor. The nature of work performed by cowboys in different Western cultural spaces lends itself to generating occupational lore that labors to reify specific notions of masculinity among men. For me, it is how black cowboys draw from a diverse cultural repertoire to construct renderings of

blackness and black masculinities that shift in different contexts that represent the archive of American Western sociocultural history.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

"Ideally, the present will always contribute to the building of the future. And this future is not the future of the cosmos but rather the future of my century, my country, my existence. In no fashion should I undertake to prepare the work that will come later. I belong irreducibly to my time (Fanon 1967, 13)."

Introduction

My purpose for exploring knowledge production in male dominated spaces is a manifestation of my tendency to combine social elements that "traditional" worldviews would deem incompatible or mutually exclusive, according to socially prescribed ways of being. This way of viewing social interactions is reminiscent of the anti-miscegenation laws that banned marriage between whites and blacks in the U.S. My conception of the way in which knowledge production among black cowboys combines social ideas about the gendered division of labor wherein women are represented as bearers of culture. This role manifests through childrearing practices and the timeless debate of nature versus nature in human evolution.

The questions I will attend to throughout my reflections and analysis of knowledge production among black cowboys will draw heavily on foundations in the intellectual tradition of Black existentialism. The acute awareness and consideration of double consciousness as an everyday experience in Black Anthropological scholarship will guide my review of foundations on which this study stands. In my master's level

wok, I commented on early anthropological practices in data collection, analysis, and interpretations reflecting colonialist perspectives of the researcher about "exotic" others[9].

In "The Decolonizing Generation: (Race and) Theory in Anthropology since the Eighties," Anthropologist Jafari Allen directs our attention to how "the archive as we know so well, is an index of structures of power and domination (Allen and Jobson 2016, 135)." He goes on to qualify the position anthropologists are in, given the state of archival information, and says that "even as anthropologists rehearse this poststructuralist mantra, scant efforts have been made to turn this insight back toward the archive of anthropology itself (Allen and Jobson 2016, 135)."The scholastic history of knowledge production in the social world, since the enlightenment, has carried streams of disciplinary decadence that lead to ontological conclusions about "the Other."

These experiences proceed from specific cultural boundaries around intersections of multiple identities as they are situated within – at the top of— the social hierarchy. The resulting ideologies inform the fashioning of theoretical tools that we use to translate cultural cues and codes between ways of knowing things about one's social world. The circumstances of this *disciplinary decadence*, or as philosopher and social critic Gordon R. Lewis defines, "the ontological reification of a discipline and its

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9 Early anthropological models for studying minority identities and the race/gender nexus are limited. The work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz offers a model for exploring different aspects of social identities and intersectionality in Anthropological inquiry. For example, Geertz's "Deep Play: Notes on Balinese Cockfighting" lends itself to an anthropological discussion about masculinity in male dominated space, although his purpose was not to study male-male interactions. As a cultural and "racial" outsider, Clifford Geertz provides a model for navigating male dominated spaces characterized by aggression, competition, and play (Geertz 2005).

assertion as absolute eventually leads to no room for other disciplinary perspectives (Gordon 2006, 4-5)." Beyond the potential for other disciplinary ways of knowing things about human culture and society, there is the question of how we can access and know ways that people outside of these ivory towers produce and consume knowledge for everyday sustainability.

My theoretical foundations for this study emerged from the way literature on gender constructs situate performances of masculinity at the intersection of race (Awkward 1995; Baker 2010; Jackson 2011; Johnson and Henderson 2007; Neal 2013; Rice 2008; Richardson 2007; S. Taylor 2008; Neal 2005; hooks 2004; hooks 2004). This literature also points to stratification of racialized gender identities along class lines in America's patriarchal system. I believe that Black cowboys help us understand that relationship by exploring ways that black masculinities are negotiated, embodied, and articulated. I use Victor Turner's social drama to frame the way I interpret the social interactions I observed. I find his model most useful for critically engaging performances of race and gender as socially defined, negotiated, and culturally (en)scribed by and onto the body.

My position is that cowboys' performances of masculinity challenge common sense understandings about contemporary black male identities because their masculinized experiences illustrate mechanisms used to navigate the complex relationship, or the false dichotomy, between (male) privilege and (racial)

marginalization for this group (Curry 2013)[10]. What I mean by this is that there is no male privilege in the sense that racialization of gender roles in black communities is a one-off from general responses to the ways in which marginalization affects in-group fashioning of those roles among each other.

These opening remarks are meant to situate the many black voices that come through these pages as informed, partly, by the tools handed to us from colonialist structures and modes of thought. The way mainstream American society treats black bodies in culturally white spaces cannot take away lessons we must teach and learn from each other about our intimate relationship to race and gender. Ways of knowing and citing sources as credible need not necessarily be approved by a system designed to marginalize and silence black voices.

Existentialism and Whiteness in the Black Imagination

Psychoanalyst and philosopher, Frantz Fanon, was inspired by his own experiences with the broad reach of colonialist power and its manifestation in hierarchies of dominance that permeate, what he describes as, "experiences of the black" in his book "Black Skin White Mask[11]." This exercise in existential reflection situates black consciousness within dialectical expressions of blackness and whiteness. Although his

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[10] Philosopher Dr. Tommy Curry has argued that there's no black male privilege during a 2013 interview "On the Myth of Black Male Privilege and Violence" with ReddingNews Review.com available online (Curry 2013).

[11] To this point, culture theorist Stuart Hall is worth quoting at length from "What is this 'black' in black popular culture? He suggests that "perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production,' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation (Hall, What is this "black" in black popular culture? 1993)."

concluding remarks return to race as the tie that binds, he takes care to point to situations in which the black man may experience his blackness among other black men. As a man writing of and from his time, the inextricable ties that bind blackness to whiteness remain a guiding principle in contemporary thought and interaction.

For Fanon, "the fact of the juxtaposition of the white and black races has created a massive psychoexistential complex," which he hopes that his work will "persuade [his] brother, whether black or white, to tear off with all his strength and shameful livery put together by centuries of incomprehension (Fanon 1967, 53)." His reflections on the black man as an artifact of white coloniality captures experiences that are useful for engaging the vicissitude of blackness[12]. Of interest to my discussion about the dialectic created between the races is the way in which Fanon articulates "the moment of 'being for others'" when a black man is among his own and can experience "his being through others (Fanon 1967, 109)[13]." His argument, which is later refuted by scholars in the

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12 In, "On the Coloniality of Being," Nelson Maldonado-Torres defines Coloniality [as] "different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism (Maldonado-Torres 2007)."

13 Fanon's articulations about the Negro is expressed as the dialectics of blackness and whiteness based on his experiences with French colonialist history and post-colonial society. He problematizes this through a delineation of ways people of African descent are treated in different countries and the way that Negro is defined in France. In this context, Fanon clarifies that "In America, Negroes are segregated, In South America, Negroes are whipped in the streets, and Negro strikes are cut down by machine guns. In West Africa, the Negro is an animal. And there beside me, my neighbor in the university, who was born in Algeria, told me: 'as long as the Arab is treated like a man, no solution is possible." He goes on to recall his neighbor saying, "understand dear boy, color prejudice is something I find utterly foreign…But of course, come in, sir, there is no color prejudice among us…Quiet, the Negro is a man like ourselves…It is not because he is black that he is less intelligent than we are…I has a Senegalese buddy in my army who was really clever…" Where am I to be classified? Or, if you prefer, tucked away? "A Martinican, a native of 'our' old colonies." Where shall I hide? (Fanon 1967, 113)."

Negritude moment, asserts that "the black man among his own in the twentieth century does not know at what moment his inferiority comes into being through the other (Fanon 1967, 258)[14]." The issue here is that, among his own, the black man, as all men, develop other ways to relate to each other that are tangential to white perceptions of white superiority. Their commentary about the historical present offers some insight to this regardless of the ability to locate the precise moment one's inferiority comes into being for whomever the 'other' may be.

In the contemporary moment, this cultural trauma passed down through generations and carried into The Fact of Blackness, means that there is more to be explored in the way whiteness is represented in the black imagination. This kind of inquiry requires acute attention to the way predominately black male spaces facilitate the reification or decolonization of blackness. In *Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination,* bell hooks adds to the conversation of how "collectively, black people remain silent about representations of whiteness in the black imagination (hooks 1997, 167)." She explains that "as the days of racial segregation where black folks learned to 'wear the mask,' many of us pretend to be comfortable in the face of whiteness only to turn our back and give expressions to intense levels of discomfort (hooks 1997, 167)." Admittedly, hooks' own thoughts about such representations were "stimulated by classroom discussions about the way in which the absence of recognition is a strategy

[14] Fanon's assertion about black soul as artifact is useful for the beginnings of an analysis about race and the post-colonial subject. However, James Baldwin's calls for a critical reflection into the multiple realities of Blacks.

that facilitates making a group 'the Other' (hooks 1997, 167)." These general observations about the contexts in which black people express *intense levels of discomfort* mark boundaries around contexts in which these sentiments *are* expressed and provide an alternative object of focus for this project in the contemporary moment. The work of black activists on the political front, have changed the regulatory functions that supported the terrorization of blacks who expressed dissatisfaction with the fact of their status as second-class citizens in American society[15]. Because of shifts in the social-political climate, hooks observed her white student's "amazement that black people watch white people with a critical 'ethnographic' gaze." She goes on to call these reactions "expressions of racism (hooks 1997, 167)." The black people who challenge direct actions by whites to cause them discomfort opens a space to explore the tactics they use to reconfigure existential whiteness — at least within the intimate confines of temporal encounters.

Cultivating their own: Personal Experience Narratives and Black Masculinity

The narrative genres of folktale, legend and personal experience narrative have qualities that overlap and features or functions that draw a through line which connects one to the other. The task is to distinguish between the narrative genres of the categories

[15] The prevailing ideology among the dominant culture in the United States is that black males are inferior, and for some time were considered 3/4ths of a man, because of their race. This worldview causes scapegoating in the form of homogenizing, criminalizing, and hyper-sexualizing African American males. Sociologists, psychologists, and African-American Studies scholars have documented consequences of white male scapegoating via negative mainstream imagery about African American males based on race/gender and sexuality (Aptheker 2005; Awkward 2005; S. Taylor 2008). Their findings suggest that the difference between the past and the historical present is that Black male bodies invoke the same race-based and gender-based stereotypes from the 1600s.

to illustrate how narratives of personal experience bring competing models of black masculinity into focus as limited in their ability to recast these notions as progressive in the contemporary moment (Mutua 2006). The way in which these tales can do this is best understood through the relationship between the generic types of tales that are presented in conversation. Conversation is the most inclusive category that is discussed in this composition. In "The Oral Personal Narrative in Its Generic Context (1977)," Sandra K Stahl defines it as "[a] seemingly random conglomerate, showing repeatable patter only in the grammar and words themselves (37)." Black cowboys are the vehicle through which personal experiences bring to bear social realities that illustrate how notions of (black) masculinity are as varied as the number of black males there are (Edwards 2012; Johnson 2008; Richardson 2007).

Stahal's 1998 article, "Contributions of Personal Narrative Research to North American Folkloristics (1988)," helps to highlight the significance of these distinctions in the context of this ethnography. This is important because, as with one of the hallmarks of black culture, improvisation occurs as part of the act of storytelling. As with any art form that is defined by rules of style, form and content, black folks have been known to take what is needed from any genre and to communicate their message. For example, think of jazz music. What I'm describing here is a similar process applied to different genres of folktale in the context of conversation about black western experiences. The assumption here is that, given the chance to brag, no man can tell a more legendary tale about himself than he.

According to Stahl, the personal experience narrative is not generally accepted as its own genre in the current state of the art. There are some folklorists who accept the personal experience narrative as a separate genre with defining characteristics. For my purpose, it is and I observe how Stahl defines personal narrative as

> a prose narrative relating a personal experience; it is usually told in first person and its content is nontraditional. The word "prose" in the definition refers to transcribed text, which in this case is written in prose form resembling a short story or play script (20)

Stahl adds that personal narrative can be "understood without any reference to preceding conversation or narration," idiosyncratic, secular experience, although Von Sydow would argue that the "supernatural is a more personal experience than secular (21-22)." Personal narratives are also "accounts of how various ordinary people reacted to a given situation (27)." She draws on other definitions of personal narrative to include features that are necessarily arguable based on their presence or necessity as part of other genres or sub-genres of folktale. For example, she cites Alver describing the "individual memorate [as] simply an impossibility, [because] all operative 'personal' beliefs and definitions of the supernatural come through some reaction to the collective belief in society (23)." This sets up the transition into how a memorate presupposes a legend.

All legends, according to Stahl, "presuppose a memorate as their original source," revert to 'personal' form that "there is no basis for distinguishing between legend and a 'supposed' original memorate (21)." The content of legends must be traditional, widely circulated, known to many people. The types of legends that Stahl

reviews are realistic legend, historical legend, and belief legend. Unlike the personal narrative, legends in the I-form is untrue. That is, if someone tells of a legend about their self it is 1.) Not true, although the teller narrates the tale as truth and 2.) It is not a personal experience though, too, this would be hard to distinguish without an index, according to Stahl (25). Legends are more concerned with "how the man of the legend acts in view of his remarkable experience (27)."

Many, if not all, of the personal experiences narratives I collected were shared through conversations in semi-structured interviews. As part of my research strategy, I had many conversations which make up the space where personal experiences, anecdotes, jokes, and legends were shared with me. These conversations set up the relationship between personal experience narrative and legend that highlights the significance of addressing the way black masculinities are negotiated within a subcultural practice not commonly associated with black culture to illustrate the experiential outcomes produced in the way they are communicated. It also begs the question, given the qualities associated with the stuff legends are made of, what does one call a legend embedded in a personal experience narrative?

The Tools and Their Many Uses

My point of departure for situating black cowboys' experiences within anthropology as a field of study approaches the relationship of African Americans in U.S. history as contentious and dictated by politics that would maximize platforms for the civil rights of blacks. This moment is one in which the stakes for claims to civil rights need not necessarily be a matter of division within the community and therefore

prioritized along strict racial or gendered lines. For example, to some black women the race/gender divide and having to choose which movement to show a support of solidarity was a salient point of contention. Either march with the men for the civil right of all black people or fight for women's rights during the 1960s (Hudson-Weems 2002; Barkley Brown 2009). My interest and position is rooted in a contemporary moment where scholars can tackle issues of multiple points of intersectionality in black communities as modeled by E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (2007). Johnson and Henderson illustrate this point specifically regarding the use of binary racial categories and the way

> dominant black male leadership, [during the] Civil Rights and Black Power movements of [the late 1960s and early 1970s], provided the historical backdrop and social street scene fueling interventions [that] brought pressure to bear on white administrators as predominantly white institutions of higher learning around the United States (3)

A contemporary example of Black males' bodies deviating from the ascribed marginalized social spaces can be found in their presence in America's mainstream (white) world. Regarding the archaeology of knowledge in the academy, I understand the socio-political significance of maintaining mainstream society's binaries to highlight how they create and perpetuate hierarchies. Similarly, Johnson and Henderson also observe how "the deconstruction of binaries and the explicit "unmarking" of difference have serious implications for those for whom these other differences "matter" (5).

In *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum,* Bridget R. Cooks describes art critics' negative reactions to Black male artists in America's mainstream art world. In her depiction, Cooks describes how "art critics, some of whom were faced with viewing an exhibition of art by Black American artist for the first time […] shifted from their regular approaches because their understanding of racial Blackness disqualified the show as an art exhibit" (Cooks 2011:88). This example demonstrates how social, political, and historical processes may change the socio-political conditions and environments in which Black, heterosexual males appear out of place, because their presence, regardless of sexuality, is a deviation from the social demographic norm historically established and maintained.

In, "The Early Black History Movement, Carter G Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnson Green," Pero Dagbove provides one of many examples of how academic questions of studying issues within black communities became a matter of motive and approach. Black intellectuals asked: How should we produce and consume history? What is the role of the black intellectual? Is this role different today (Dagbovie 2007)? Black intellectuals end up being so comfortable and displaced because they feel that they must be apologetic about where they are. The important thing is that this work extends from and lives as a narrative that continues to go back to that space. There is a torment over the responsibility of black intellectuals because the labor to write and to right the wrongs of inaccurate representations and marginalization of Blacks in U.S. history in a way that is undeniably humanizing. There is also the work of recovering the lost voices that were silenced as the official narrative of U.S. history was written and passed down

through generations. Historically the concern has been about documenting instances of racism and discrimination in patriarchal American society on black men and black women. Solutions have been to implement programs to address these concerns.

Dagbove quotes Woodson as prescribing, "Race prejudice, from segregation to violence, resulted from the widely accepted notion that black people had not contributed anything of worth to the world civilization […] and that if the historical record was set straight and if the history of black people was studied in schools along with the achievements of others, not only would black youth develop a sense of pride and self-worth, but racism would also be abolished (Dagbovie 2007, 48)." This ethnography comes at a time when personal experience narratives can work to say more than "we were here." The lessons that I've learned through observing, participating, and interviewing Black cowboys builds on scholarship that moves toward understanding individual experiences at the intersection of multiple socially constructed identities – intersectionality. It also adds to the challenges people face when different aspects of their identity comes with its own privileges and history of discrimination.

Gender and Blackness

Ronald L. Jackson II, calls for a (re)construction of imagined a singular racial masculinity, in his book "Masculinity in the Black Imagination." He poses a challenge to question pedagogies that reinforce racist ontological arguments by prescribing the use of "our imaginations [to] properly assist us in comprehending the possibilities of liberation from a pathologized Blackness and perhaps, an even more sinister, singular racial masculinity that has come to be known as "Black masculinity" (3). In her book, "We

Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity," bell hooks observed an equally disturbing phenomenon in academic scholarship about the discourses surrounding Black men. hooks observes that "despite the advances in civil rights in our nation, feminist movement, sexual liberation, when the spotlight is on black males the message is usually that they have managed to stay stuck, that as a group they have not evolved with the times (hooks 2004, ix)." Currently, the literature that explores and interprets the intersection of masculinity and race [and to a lesser extent region, and performance] employ white American cultural sensibilities and worldviews. My interest and position is rooted in a contemporary moment where scholars can tackle issues of multiple masculinities. This attitude is useful for fracturing socially imbedded notions about the type of masculinity that reinforces a sense of "authentic" blackness; to go beyond the limitations placed on black male bodies to perform a stereotyped hyper masculinity.

"Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology," is also useful here as a collection of essays that bridge the gap between the two equally oppressed subjectivities that depict Black Studies and Queer Studies as "destabilizing fixed notions of identity by deconstructing binaries (Johnson and Henderson 2005, 5)." It is important to note here that both oppressed groups must use 'the master's tools,'" via binary categories, to challenge mainstream America's views on race and sexuality that must be considered for its exclusionary effect. Johnson and Henderson orient this collection of essays within the scope of male privilege and the history of black intellectuals in higher education.

This work provides a useful lens to articulate how certain ways of exhibiting masculinity, with respect to gender roles, may be rejected by black communities.

Prevailing ideologies about masculinity within black communities' map sex(uality) onto gender and these manifest through ways in which a man displays dominance[16]. Specifically, black people's responses to the emasculation of males through practices of buck breaking that originated in slavery. The purpose of this practice was to institute, demonstrate, and reinforce white male dominance and black male inferiority.

In Sweet Tea, E. Patrick Johnson's reflexivity about personal experiences growing up in the South and as a researcher "coming home" to do research on male subjectivities inspires some of the questions I explore. He speaks about the notion of respectability as the acceptance of any deviation from the norm of the community, for example homosexuality, whether overtly or covertly. This especially true if it does not (overtly) disrupt or threaten the established order (Johnson 2008). In patriarchal systems of power, the male sex is privileged based on the ideology that males are the dominant sex- opposing characteristics are ascribed to the female sex (hooks 2004). The notion of male dominance produces cultural ideologies about gender roles, or socially ascribed patterns of behavior, mapped onto sex. This reveals logical fallacies in the application and understanding of how males experience sex/gender and its associated privileges. Indicators of privilege look different between cultures and among males.

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[16] The assertion of dominance becomes the focus of representing black masculinity in response to practices of buck breaking and its shifting forms to reassert white male dominance and power in American society. This as opposed to the practice of buck breaking and its shifting forms in American society that took away black male agency over their bodies and denied them the use of brute strength to protect or defend against terroristic attacks.

Deviations from the prescribed way of performing hegemonic masculinity is met with alienation and, in some cases, violence. There is a range of terms used to stigmatize illegible black masculinities (Neal 2013). The term I use to translate masculinity among black cowboys between predominant cultural ways of knowing is "queer." This term has developed a history of different uses to describe sexuality and identity. In this study, I draw on the work of Cathy Cohen, in "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens," to employ a definition of queer that means "to fuck with gender (Johnson and Henderson 2005, 37)" This definition is useful for articulating the peculiarities of black men as cowboys where the cowboy figure represents white masculinity in mainstream media.

Regional Black Masculinity

Prevailing literature on western masculinity portrays the culture as representative of white culture. The discussion here is useful for situating the fact of blackness among cowboys as peculiar among commonsense notions of racial representations and peculiarities of western masculinity through performances of blackness historically situated and regionally constructed. However, it is worth noting that blacks have been represented in western films as reported by Lawrence B. de Graaf and Julia Leyda in "Recognition, Racism, and Reflections on the Writing of Western Black History" and

"Black-Audience Westerns and the Politics of Cultural Identification in the 1930's" respectively[17],[18].

Black cowboys' relegation to the past leaves contemporary Black cowboys nearly invisible, except to other Black cowboys, friends, family, and, in the case of rodeo to their competition. In short, separate from individuals who interact with Black cowboys, many people remain ignorant of both their historical presence and their contemporary existence. Dominant narratives about notable Black cowboys are written from a historical perspective and suggest two things about Black cowboys:

1. History suggest that Black cowboys are a "thing of the past" and extinct figures in American society.
2. Where cowboys are depicted as a social-cultural staple on the U.S. frontier during westward expansion and the subsequent cattle boom, literature

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[17] Lawrence B. de Graaf locates the 1960's as the point when historical literature about the impact of black Americans in the western history began to experience a significant increase. According to de Graaf, the way history is written in terms of visibility and erasure occurred because "once the Old Northwest and Southwest [had] passed the frontier stage, the history of blacks in those areas becomes indistinguishable from their major characteristics in non-frontier sections of the North and South, respectively (23)."As a result of shifting notions about how regional boundaries and black populations occupying those spaces were mapped, de Graff observes how "even the discussion of slavery was largely confined to the Old Southwest, leaving the impression that the West was devoid of the racial problems (except those involving Indians) that plagued other regions (24)." Before this time, he says "the treatment of Negros in western history suffered from other problems which accentuated the effects of this 'invisibility' (27)."

[18] Leyda describes "The significance of these westerns in the history of American cinema is that they challenged the prevailing function of race as a signifier in American cinema [by] employing the metaphors of space and home, [which Toni] Morrison questions [in her essay "Home"]. The heart of the matter: the house, the cinema, and the nation are at stake for black audiences of these westerns. The question of ownership, entitlement, and citizenship is quite literal at the story level in the ever-present motif of land disputes, as well as implicit in the genre itself, which has often been a vehicle for expressing not only whiteness but also white supremacy. The visual and spatial transgressions in black westerns, picturing black men in the preserve of the white Hollywood cowboy, enact a geographic re-territorialization in addition to a cinematic one (50)."

suggests racialized cowboys were largely absent in the American west except if they proved to possess exceptional "cowboying" abilities.

Black cowboys' roles and positionality within American history and sport performs a limited function towards inserting and increasing awareness of alternative representations of (Black) cowboys and their masculinities in the contemporary moment. Insofar as models of western blackness are limited, even in the available literature, conceptions of blackness are understood in terms of regional conflicts between the U.S. North and U.S. South that are representative of opposing views about status of Blacks. This guiding principle leads me to insert a regional approach to blackness that draws on the social construction of blackness in the South.

In *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South: from Uncle Tom to Gangsta*, Riché Richardson approaches regional variants of black masculinity in the South. Her research on literary representations of Black maleness suggests that black males in different states within a region have notions of black masculinity that vary and take on an antagonistic relationship. Her foundations for building this narrative changes the way Southern identity informs notions of Blackness and masculinity that are constructed and transformed through lived experiences. She begins with the social and political significance of the Civil War to the antebellum period and this is important to following the trajectory of shifting notions of blackness within black communities. She also observes how the constant presence of the dominant hegemonic white male patriarchal figures are active agents in the construction of black masculinity. But what can we learn

from the way black men engage the particularities of black masculinity among their own?

Like Richardson, Cultural Studies scholar, Mark Anthony Neal, observes that "while so many aspects of black identity have flourished in the post-civil-rights era, allowing for rich and diverse versions of blackness, black masculinity is still in need of radical reconstruction" (Neal: 2005:28). The academic work towards documenting these processes, as with all things, had to wait for the broader categories of race and gender to be explicated in their own circumstances within American society. Still, in *Advancing Identity Theory by Engaging the Black Male Adolescent*, psychologist, Davis Wall Rice introduces a point here, that Black Men Cultivate their Own by emphasizing how

> this negotiation [of cultural identity constructs] is complex, nuanced, and though not always socially acceptable is a success considering the perils of progressing as a black male in the Western Hemisphere" (xi-xv).

The specific ways in which Black men negotiate these constructs do not always occur, on the spot, among white people. To that point, I look at the resilient ways in which black cowboys transmit knowledge about their likeness in the western world as a microcosm of dominant American culture.

Western Masculinity

I want to briefly address "White Masculinity in the Recent South (2008)" because it is important to situate the individual parts of black masculinity within the general topic of masculinity and how white masculinity as the cultural norm of the U.S.

is particularly informed by southern culture and society including in the North. This means that, although depictions of blacks on the western frontier are scarce and that leads us to believe that black western culture is specifically modeled after official narratives and representation, white cowboys carry an ideology about race that is informed by southern history. In short, nationalistic notions about manhood are rooted in the Deep South and black cowboys are not necessarily aspiring to a white aesthetic of masculinity or manhood.

In "White Masculinity in the Recent South (2008)," Trent Watts curates a "collection of essays [that] move beyond [the familiar stereotypes] and demonstrate[s] some of the multiple ways and places in which white men have acted upon their own and their culture's conceptions of white manhood (2)." About unmarked manhood, region and history, it is important to bear in mind that white southerners have held competing models of manhood and masculinity since the 1800s within and outside of the South[19]. Watts frames this relationship "historically [as] white southern manhood in its idealized forms [having been] structured around two core values, mastery and independence; the ideals are sometimes in tension, sometimes complementary" (8). He argues that "If mastery has lain and continues to lie at the heart of definitions of white southern manhood, another of its key values had been the ideal of independence, usually defined in economic terms (10)."

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[19] "late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century southern politics and culture was shaped by the determination of many white men to combat perceived threats which included public lynching of black men, prickly sensitivity to criticism of southern institution, and a fierce loyalty to a white-only Democratic party" (8).

Far from unique to the South, aspirations of landownership or independent producer status animated generations of 18th and 19th century white American men" (10). "The ideal of independent performative white manhood has also been embodied in the figure of the hell-raising good old boy: hard-drinking, hard-fighting, and most of all contemptuous of restraint or outside of interference, whether by the government or his "betters (10-11)." He concludes with remarks about asserting contemporary notions dominance in white masculinity stating that "these days, notions of mastery in the South are more likely to manifest themselves in terms of gender than of race" (8).

Dealing with Race and Regional Identity

My understanding of "black cowboy-ness," in the context of this project is that black cowboys possess a unique position from which to discuss Americas social and cultural present that is informed by African American history (as well as local language and geography) that inverts official narratives of identity and citizenship/belonging. This connection is based on an identity rooted in experiences with a history of racism, prejudice, and discrimination, as well as triumphs over these systemic obstacles and what this looks like in daily interactions. This connection goes beyond shared experiences and is manifested in how black cowboys use material culture and understandings of their relationship to work and the land to represent identities (black, Southern, masculine) in "likeness of" or "opposition to" commonsense notions of the American cowboy.

The function of race in (black) Western communities and the social history of race in the context of regional influences addresses the disproportionate focus of

developing a meta-narrative of racial formation in the context of U.S. history as North and South. This does not account for the cultural meanings given to "blackness" in other regions of the U.S., particularly relevant for this project the West, and suggests that the social construct of racial politics in the West is contained in that region. This representation suggests that black people in the West are a product of cultural developments that occurred during the development of the West, as northwest, and southwest, regions of the U.S. However, this region does not exist in a vacuum and the narrative does not account for the movement of people and new cultural creations of meaning for blackness as a Western identity. These black Western identities have been transmitted through time and across geographic boundaries to inform the folk practices developed and cultivated in the context of the West.

The model of discussing power and mapping the distribution of power as above and below onto geographic regions of North and South falsely and inaccurate does not account for the West region as a contributor of expanding/dismantling the invented dichotomy of race in the U.S. As a result, this model is has limited the process and practice of racialization to exist along the high low dichotomy that is mapped on to race relations in the U.S. North and South. The work of Pierre Bourdieu is most useful for situating this social, and subsequent cultural, dichotomy as a matter of taste that people manifest through bidirectional hierarchies of difference and distance. In his article "Classes and Classifications (1984)", Bourdieu describes how

> All the agents in a given social formation share a set of basic perceptual schemes, which receive the beginning of objectification in the pairs of

> antagonistic adjectives commonly used to classify and qualify persons or object in the most varied areas of practice. The network of oppositions between high (sublime, elevated, pure) and low (vulgar, low, modest) is the matrix of all commonplaces which find such ready acceptance because behind them lies the whole social order (468).

Black masculinity is framed as an abject and undesirable "other" to white masculinity and it is rooted in historical traditions and cultural practices (Richardson 2007; Omi and Winant 1986). A black male's subjectivities are defined by his ability to be a charismatic leader of his household, family and community. This social reality is illustrated by contemporary historicity, but is limited by several social factors (Edwards 2012). The socio-historical trajectory of how black males negotiate racialized gender identity is framed by shifting notions of black cultural politics of gender and common-sense notions of black masculinity in contemporary moment (Johnson 2008; Stahl 1977). The point of departure for this project is my idea that Black cowboys' notions of masculinity are significantly related to their personal experiences in ways that complicate cis-gendered notions of gender roles ascribed to biological sex. The role of black cowboys and how to read their embodiment gets complicated in the nationalistic cultural context of a figure that is the hero and the villain and is responsible for policing borders facilitating the expansion of a territory. This narrative has historically been heavily dictated by historians.

Citationality: Coolness

The execution of black masculine performances, in any given situation, can be located at particular social and historical contexts informed by, and that inform, codes and scripts from which black males are provided with and invited to choose. This process of "citationality" refers to the way we use something as an example of an idea. In the context of my study there is the "right" versus "wrong" way to exemplify blackness so that others recognize, in this case, the performance, as a black cultural performance and not mimicry of white masculinity. "Coolness" is the concept that I refer to as the exemplified performance that may or may not be "cited" correctly and therefore not read as "cool" in this specific sub-cultural space. A black cultural practice that may be read as "cool" in hip-hop, for example, may not translate the same way in a western space because the reference is not there or was not carried over.

There is a long history of the oral tradition of storytelling among people of African descent and it is a hallmark of western culture right down to what qualifies as country western music. However, many people have never seen black cowboys represented in the way that these men operate in the contemporary moment. Meanwhile, in popular culture, on Wednesday November 2, 2016, recording artist Beyoncé Knowles gave a surprise performance of her song Daddy Lessons, from her 2016 album Lemonade, at the Country Music Awards as country music trio the Dixie Chicks sang backup. There was much controversy over whether the song should be considered country music. Many of her peers in the country music industry say "yes" and they've

cited the presence of instruments commonly used in country music, themes present in her story, and most notably the element of storytelling.

It is useful to intervene here with the function of performativity in the inscription of cultural values and beliefs onto the intersection of the racialized body and the gendered body. A common discussion in literature on blackness and the black body in U.S. society is the balancing act that black people perform the way they attend to different systems of power and the rules of engagement in racialized spaces. I want to insert the performative manifestation of this psychological balancing act that has, for bell hooks and Robert Ferris Thompson, become a conversation about coolness as an aesthetic.

Butler's conversation about the function of performativity, via an utterance, illustrates how an action has multiple levels of affect that can be identified through theoretical abstractions and applied to the material word. Simply put, performativity is something that is not the product of a single act because that single act does not constitute its quality as fixed nor tangible. It is important to note that while race and gender can be used to simultaneously modify bodies, theses modifiers are discussed individually as having fluid and malleable properties. I highlight this point to say that the intersection of two modifiers onto one body does not make the representation of that single identity, which informs and is informed by both, an identity that should be homogenized in public discourse and here as "the black man."

In *Bodies that Matter,* Susan Foster's work is useful to insert the function of performative inscriptions of cultural values and beliefs onto the intersection of the

racialized body and the gendered body. She articulates clearly how the performative of a complex social identity intervenes in social interactions with individuals of that same identity and with multiple "others." This helps to elucidate mechanisms that support the established racial hierarchy and racialized gender hierarchy. It is a useful point of entry into my discussion of contemporary black masculinity in Texas that allows for the articulation of this identity as well as the positionality it has within its own ethnic community, national and regional socio-history, and members of the same sex in the dominant society along gendered boundaries.

But first, it is important to remember that there is knowledge that goes unrecorded (unwritten) because it can only be embodied in (canonized) practices as "the proper" way of "doing" something in any culture. In this respect, it is the organizing framework that situates how African Americans negotiate the connotations for what it means to be a "cowboy" in different social settings. These interactions frame how individual and group identities are entities with various roles to play in U.S. society and they reveal social and cultural values placed on those roles. For example, the hero, the anti-hero, and who gets to be visible in those roles. In "Choreographies of Gender," Foster says of people:

> In the sustained development of their activities, they will appear to narrate events, to tell a kind of story, perhaps with characters, motivations, and responses to one another, or perhaps to speak of the weight, momentum, and agility of which bodies are capable. They may enunciate values and relationships characteristic of a particular ethnic identification, or they may

> present a series of affective states. Accumulating these choices concerning the behavior of bodies, the choreography builds up an image of community, one that articulates both individual and collective identities (8).

It is useful to think through shifting perspectives on the way blackness is embodied in western culture in such a way that highlights seemingly contradictory attitudes towards issues associated with being a cultural minority. For example, the stereotypes about blackness that's reject and accepted in different situations. These discussions are about performances of gender as the (re)presentational displays of repetitive social (pre)script (ion) s. For example, while contemporary black cowboys are generations removed from the (historical) memory of struggles endured by the black cowboys whose history they recite, they still experience and can articulate stereotypes of how Black people were presented in the media between each other.

These choreographies look like continuous demonstrations of coolness as defined in the work of RF Thompson, in "An Aesthetic of Cool," as a concept that is "the metaphorical extension" of "*control*, having the value of *composure* in the individual context [and] *social stability* in the context of the group." In "We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity," bell hooks defines "coolness" in the context of being real. In her chapter, The Coolness of Being Real, she provides three interpretations of the dance between "men confronted with the hardships of life without allowing their spirits to be ravaged (147)." She says that, at one point

> Black male cool was defined by the ability to withstand the heat and remain centered. It was defined by black male willingness to confront reality, to

> face the truth, and bear it not be adopting a false pose of cool while feeding on fantasy; not by black male denial or by assuming a 'poor me' victim identity. It was defined by individual black males daring to self-define rather than be defined by others (147).

The goal here was to demonstrate that the intersection of two modifiers onto one body does not make the only representation of that single identity, which informs and is informed by both, as an identity that should be generalized in public discourse and here as "the black man" who performs blackness within a limited range of scripts that do not shift narratives of blackness or black masculine experiences.

The extent to which stereotypical personae of the "the African American" and "the cowboy" are at odds with each other and how concepts of performance, role, and theatricality are useful for coming to terms with these competing personae, I turn to *Theatricality: A Study of Convention in the Theater and Social Life* (1972). In this study, Burns describes how the conventions and codes ascribed to theatricality, or drama, which is for "real", sets it apart from performance that is "for show," and simultaneously characterizes theatricality as performance. Where performance is most broadly defined as "act(ion)s" whether they are "for real" or "for show," behaviors become theatrical, or dramatic, when

> People's performances are assessed [and] they are accused of 'over-playing' or 'underplaying' a part […] Their actions take place in 'scene' which is 'set.' Such language is still used to distinguish actions of a more or less theatrical nature [and] most people like to think that sometimes they

> behave 'naturally', and 'themselves,' while confessing that sometimes they 'put on an act.' The presumption is that there is an approved 'normal' level of behavior very difficult to define which is neither too expressive nor too inexpressive (Burns: 12).

In performance, representations are "acceptable" as restored behaviors that are not necessarily tied to the historical present of the show and performance, as restored behavior, is mediated between by representations between what is "for real" and what is "for show." We should build on notions of each as they seem to exist in mutually exclusive social worlds. In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997), Stuart Hall references Donald Bogle's 1973 study where he identifies "five main stereotypes [about American-Americans] which made the cross-over" into American (popular) cinema (Hall, The Spectacle of the 'Other' 1997)[20]. He lists the *Toms*, the *Coons*, the *Tragic Mulatto*, *Mammies,* and the *Bad Bucks* as the most prominent stereotypes of African Americans. Of the five main stereotypes two of them are meant to negatively portray African American females/femininities and the other three African American males/masculinities. The *Uncle Tom* as the Good [submissive] Negro, the *Coon*, or unreliable, lazy, subhuman creature, and the *Bad Buck* as the hypersexual, violent, black male savage each conflict with the stereotypical personae of the "cowboy" in different ways because of the way race is framed in the United States (Hall 1997: 251).

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[20] Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies and Bucks: an interpretative history of blacks in American films (1973).

Hall explains how "attempting to ['fix'] meaning is the work of representational practice which intervenes in the many potential meanings of an image in an attempt to privilege one (Hall 1997: 228)." "African American" bodies performing "cowboy" as a cultural practice in a social world where blackness is not as visible or readily associated with the performatives, especially when these practices are reifications of a particular type of racialized gender identity may seem theatrical depending on the gaze, or subjectivity of the person doing the looking. When "Black" bodies *show* what it looks like to bring two socially and culturally stratified identities together in one vessel, as African American cowboys, two seemingly distant (re)presentations intersect and what, to some, may have been an unthinkable way of being, becomes real.

Conclusions

Considering additional social-cultural characteristics such as class further complicates the dichotomy that males and females are socialized to perform. There is a general sense of multiple masculinities which is discussed in terms of cowboy types that are embodied and rooted notions of work versus labor. The nature of work performed by cowboys in different western cultural spaces lends itself to generating occupational lore that labors to reify notions of masculinity among men. For me, and what I hope to illustrate to you, is how black cowboys draw from a diverse cultural repertoire to construct renderings of blackness and black masculinities that shift in different contexts that represent the archive of American Western sociocultural history.

Patriarchy, as a traditional system of power between the sexes operates concurrently with racial hierarchies in the United States. As two traditional systems of

domination via power and marginalization, race and gender hierarchies produce interesting disconnects as scientific racism posits "logical," scientifically proven evidence for racial superiority and inferiority in the contemporary moment (Fairchild 1991). Black males embody the power that comes from male privilege while phenotypes, or the outward expressions of genetic make-ups, betray gender privilege at the marginalization of race for African-Americans. In the context of this study, the mechanisms, or tactics, that Black cowboys use to "make-do" in a broader social system with strategies that maintain the social order that informs race and gender hierarchies as mutually exclusive are considered progressive.

This is a project about how experiences shape identity and ways that a sense of communal belonging, based on shared identities, inform the way black cowboys see their self and interact with others as processes of identity negotiation. Many of the black cowboys in this study had some turning point in their life that instigated a conscious negotiation and manipulation of different racial or gender codes and rules as they promote upward mobility for themselves and their group. The significance of the project and reason it is possible is an attempt to push social science into the realm of everyday interactions. These interactions influence the way we choose or reflective about how what we choose to study social cultural interactions to advance knowledge and solve human problems.

The methods by which we choose to walk the path of the "other" are equally important as our many responsibilities relating to interpersonal and professional relationships. Black cowboys are an exemplar of the challenges black males face. This is

how I will have explored the social cultural significations of black masculinity in contemporary North American culture and society.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

> "As long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflict, to experience his being through others (Fanon 1967, 109)."

Introduction

I developed this study to explore self-assertions of black masculinity through experiential narratives in the generic context of southern hip-hop/rap music. However, the social-political landscape of the way hip hop was being approached in academia, at the time, presented challenges. To carry out that project would have required me to lay foundations and establish boundaries around current events and developments in hip hop and the popular music industry. For this reason, I decided to change the focus of my project from hip hop to black cowboys. In so doing, I found a subject that, to me, made a more obvious connection between black masculinity and knowledge production of gender roles.

My interest in black cowboys is an iteration of my integrationist way of understanding, and rejecting traditionalist views of my social world as I have experienced it. I have adopted and apply postmodern perspectives to explain how my tendency to bring two social elements together in one where tradition, and traditionalists, would have them mutually exclusive, or segregated. I like to think of my general cosmology as an outfit of integrated parts accessorized by postmodern accent. The way

in which I conceive of black cowboys in my treatment of identity and knowledge production is a manifestation of this integration of worldviews.

My object of study emphasized intertextual manifestations of the way black men produce knowledge about masculinity in contemporary black Western culture in the U.S. South. Faced with the decision to "chart new territories," as I saw it, I needed to find a subject that had not garnered as much popular or academic attention. As if masculinity is not already a marginal discipline in gender studies, I doubled down by saddling up with black cowboys and staying the course with black masculinity. The work of feminist scholarship in response to patriarchy does not account for the way in which patriarchy as a system hurts certain groups of men as well. By inserting race, I will be able to illustrate this point through the unique challenge of addressing ways black men handle the subtle slippage of power between male privilege and black marginalization. This will highlight the particularly obscure vantage point of masculinity provided by black cowboys.

For me black cowboys bring together socio-cultural elements that, for many people, may exist as mutually exclusive in traditional worldviews. What this means exactly requires your willingness to be reflexive about the power and privilege that you have but may not "feel," in the way that black people feel their blackness in different social settings, for example. If you are black, what this means is that, for many reason, there are cultural identities that we have not been exposed to as representations of black culture, blackness, or black being which, at first may seem peculiar. This exercise in providing two ways of reading my initial statement is one example of identity privilege (and marginalization) via access and communication.

In the United States, some people think that we (humans) live in two different (racialized) worlds and share the same physical, or geographic, space; or, at least they've tried very hard to make this a reality with social institutions like slavery and Jim Crow laws. My focus on black cowboys comes from a contemporary moment where I have experienced confusion about, and even rejection to, the existence of black cowboys. In fact, in the beginning of my research I was told that "there are no black cowboys.[21]" In a later section, I will describe the events that transpired leading up to this statement. It makes for an interesting discussion about whose experiences we choose to recognize and make formal inquiry into for social-cultural awareness, understanding and inclusion. This brings me to a minor crux, a personal hang-up, in matter of my methodological leanings — post-modernism.

My purpose and motivation for exploring knowledge production in male dominated spaces is a manifestation of my tendency to combine social elements that "traditional" worldviews would deem incompatible or mutually exclusive, according to socially prescribed ways of being. This way of viewing social interactions is reminiscent of the anti-miscegenation laws that banned marriage of whites and blacks in the U.S. My conception of the way in which knowledge production among black cowboy combines social ideas about the gendered division of labor wherein women are represented as bearers of culture. This role manifests through childrearing practices and the timeless nature versus nurture debate in human evolution.

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[21] A white man said it.

My methods were driven by an emphasis on spaces that may be considered as outside the gaze of de-racialized "others." These marginalized were found away from the presence or interest of cultural outsiders who may choose to disregard historical inequities in their (e) valuation of learning gender roles and norms. Here, my interest is in the significance of contexts where black males learn through trial and error within black cultural spaces. The specifications of where to find these kinds of spaces lead me to black rodeos, black owned and operated ranches, and to some historically black trail riding associations. There are other social organizations that offer this kind of mentorship, however; preliminary research suggests that outside of privately owned property, black males are limited in spaces where they can play at different masculine types and styles without the added pressure of racialized stereotypes about black masculinity and manhood from ethnic outsiders. This project will touch on these benefits, the challenges, and explore the effects of black cultural notions about manhood and masculinity in the way black cowboys evaluate each other in different social settings.

The methods we choose to walk the path of the other, even if we share the same sex/gender or race, is important for navigating ethical issues that may arise while interacting with people to gain their trust so that you can have access to their lives, experiences, points of view. We are asking questions to for information is to our participants are memories, values, beliefs experiences and sometimes these trigger vulnerabilities. We intentionally seek out these spaces from people, our voluntary participants. My worldview and methodology is about more than making correlation

between everyday interaction and some general, or theoretical, statement about a social or cultural group an individual belongs to.

One important practice for my success in being accepted by different members of black Western communities was meeting these cowboys on their own terms. In the beginning, I went to ranches and spent entire days helping, listening, and relating in whatever ways that I could. If one of the cowboys wanted his rodeo performance recorded so that he could review it afterwards, I participated in this way as a mutual benefit for my research and his interest. I went to the rodeos and observed, listened, took pictures and recorded the events. I went to the trailrides and experienced the fellowship around symbols of Western culture at campsites and learned of the challenges they face. What may have looked like "hanging out" and "being nosey," to some people, was, for me, part of a method designed to position myself as participant and observer in the world of my informants.

(This is) Where the Black Cowboys Are

My earliest memory of being introduced to a black cowboy is when I was 11 years old. At the time, I thought nothing of the way this cowboy's blackness intersected with popular notions of western culture as a peculiarity in the schema of representations of the American West. To me, he wasn't even a "black cowboy," he was just a cowboy. All the implication of injecting black masculinity into western cultural practices that, as many of my informants would say, have long been whitewashed was still far from my

intellectual grasp[22]. All I knew was that he was cool and that I wanted a horse of my own. That's it.

When I got to high school, I learned about the "FFA," or Future Farmers of America. The FFA is a student organization that uses agricultural education to teach leadership skills. I remember my father telling me that back in the 1970s, when he went to the high school that I attended years later, this neighborhood was made up of mostly middle class Jewish families, a few Black families, and the high school was more ethnically diverse. Now, in the early 2000s, it wasn't unusual to see black kids, teens, and adults— mostly males— riding their horses on the wide median of the neighborhood's main streets in the evening and, sometimes, late at night. By this time, the Southside of Houston was home to predominantly lower-middle to middle class, Black and Hispanic families.

My experience at this high school was culturally and demographically different. The faculty advisor of the FFA was a black man and he happened to be a cowboy. I say that he happened to be a cowboy because I'm not entirely sure that it's required for FFA faculty advisors to conform to the archive of conventions representative of the American West. And I'm certain that "white, male" cannot be a hiring requirement for this position. Anyway, he was black— something that I don't consider to be matter of happenstance— and sometimes he would ride his horse to the school. I remember hearing other students talking about him riding a horse to work and later seeing his horse

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[22] as if blackness is some biological matter that could give this subculture some "flava"

tied up in the back corner of the football field away from where the boys practiced after school. It wasn't odd that he was a black man who rode a horse so much as he rode his horse to an urban occupation.

Most people have never been introduced to the idea that a cowboy can be black. I say this because among the things commonly associated with blackness and black cultural practices, western culture or horsemanship is not on the list. We don't see black cowboys in popular media as cowboys. For example, D'Jango was an ex-slave turned bounty hunter who, like many traditional cowboy tales, protected "civilized" (white) society from outlaws. We also don't learn about black cowboys in U.S. history. The Buffalo Soldiers were defenders of the western frontier, where the state of Texas is concerned, and they may arguably be the first group of cowboys in a government uniform.

Nevertheless, my personal experiences and memories on the matter tells me that, regardless of the official narrative, black cowboys have always been there; whether I was conscious how this intersection of identities was peculiar or not. This study builds on my previous research where I explored how black males negotiate their understanding of manhood and masculinity among each other.

Before I set foot back into the neighborhood I grew up in with the perspective of a researcher, my advisor made me aware of the peculiarity of black cowboy identities in the context of popular media. I also experienced, through conversations with a white man who happened to be a historian that specialized on west Texas history, an attempt at silencing or denying me access to information about the existence of black people in

west Texas. How absurd! Had I been ignorant of the history of rural black populations in west Texas, I may have accepted the idea that there were no black cowboys in west Texas[23]. But, as it turns out, which is to be expected in the beginning, I had no idea about a lot of things regarding this point of intersectionality[24]. Namely;

1. Not every man with a horse is a cowboy.
2. Cowboying while white excuses white male lawlessness and indiscretion
3. Cowboying while black fucks with gender and notions of sexuality in confusing and uncomfortable ways for white folks (and other black folks)
4. Black cowboys are cool and therefore magical

I chose two locations to act as the primary setting for this project because I wanted to explore knowledge production among men in the black western culture. Prior research showed me that there are three general spaces for sub-cultural practices within the black western world—ranching, rodeo, and trail riding. Of these three spaces, in which black cowboys behave differently and understand the purpose of the activity as different from the other two, I learned that the status of trail riders as "real" cowboys was contentious among the group. I chose to include trail rider's perspectives because trail riding itself was not seen as questionable for a western practice. The primary

[23] Many of my informants spoke of family members who migrated from West Texas towards Houston, Texas and the surrounding area during the time of rural to urban migration which is often discussed as the movement of Black people from South to North.

settings for collecting data took place on a black owned and operated ranch and at several rodeos I attended with a professional [black] cowboy.

The ranch brought together black men whose proximity to western culture and living was variable. The only constant person here was the owner. On every visit I made to his property there was a different group of people who had a different relationship to western culture. Some of the men were "weekend cowboys," or Trail riders, other were retired professional rodeo cowboys. There were aspiring professional rodeo cowboys, and then there were a few men who "always had an interest in horses" and being friends with the owner facilitated a way for them to "hangout" in the space. Everybody helped with the work that needed to be done and afterwards we all sat under a big tree where all the trucks were parked. We drank beer and talked well into the night.

This is where many of the stories and lessons about getting along in society and with other black folks were taught and shared. After witnessing and being part of some of the lessons and conversations I had a better understanding of what was meant during individual conversations with the rancher, the retired rodeo cowboy, and the aspiring professional rodeo cowboy. My access to professional rodeo participants on the road and behind the arena (or "stage") provided a different context for male interaction in a year-round western cultural practice. In a different kind of way this setting provided occupational lore, some of which became folklore about my primary speaker on black masculinity in this arena.

Being on the road with a team of ropers – two men, typically a header and a heeler— was a completely different experience. This project follows the experiences of a

black professional team roper who prefers to be the heeler on a team of calf ropers. You need to know that rodeoing consists of different activities, or sports, that cowboys choose.

Figure 15. Cowboy practicing his calf roping technique

Figure 16. A cowboy practicing calf roping while another cowboy is making sure the calf runs in the direction the rider needs him to go for a successful run.

Figure 17. Cowboys coming out of the gate to practice roping a calf.

Typically, cowboys specialize in one event. If they are competing to be an "All-Around Cowboy," then they must participate in two or more events. The travel aspect of rodeo developed later in the history of the practice after is started on ranches by cowboys to entertain themselves after work. Today, not many black cowboys are able to work in this occupation professionally because of the many financial and political challenges that have become part of, what is now, the rodeo industry. My resource for this part of the experience took me and his mentee— a black male in his early twenties— to private training sessions that he taught, some "black" rodeos and some "white rodeos[25]."

I structured my observation of interactions between these two men in three stages. Typically, the professional cowboy would tell him everything that he thought was important to brief the mentee on what to expect about the setup, the people who were participating, how they might be treated, and how to respond (or react) to these things. During the event, they would walk around and see if they knew any of the other cowboys competing at the rodeo. The mentor usually knew a few people because he either competed at the last annual rodeo or would be competing against them in a different rodeo; also, he's been roping since he was a pre-teen and had the experience of knowing who is new and who "belongs"[26]. He stressed that networking is an important part of success as a professional cowboy and would introduce his mentee to people he

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[25] Rodeos are not segregated in this way according to Jim Crow legislation. This is just one way that people refer to rodeos where the attendees and participants are mostly white or black. It is also safe to assume, here, that the host(s) of the rodeo is either white or black too. Another way that people make a racialized distinction between rodeos is "black" and "regular."

[26] It is important to note that once a cowboy is registered as a professional in some events there is a schedule of approved rodeos that they may compete in to be ranked throughout the current rodeo season.

thought it would be good for the young roper to know. After each rodeo, they would talk about their performance as a team and individually, then they would talk about some peculiar (or "fucked up") thing that happened to them when the other person wasn't around—sometimes it was racial and sometimes it wasn't.

Entering the Space of Black Western Culture

Typically, my second or third encounter with a person or group was more informal. I didn't learn about some aspects of the way I was perceived until 5 months after first meeting one of my participants when he told me that before I first came out to his property, he thought I was "some little 'old white girl coming to get all in [his] business." I asked what made him think that about me and he said that it was because all he knew about me was that I was "a (female) researcher from [Texas] A&M." The conversation quickly changed because he thought of something else that he felt I needed to know about the men who trained him and whom he would not leave out of "the history books."

Data Collection

The data for this project was obtained using ethnographic methods. I engaged in participant-observation and conduct semi-structured interviews with black cowboys in Houston, Texas. Cowboy culture is a space in Western culture that is dominated by males and, as a female researcher, I acknowledge that the gender politics of cowboy culture influenced the interview context as the majority of my participants were male. However, in African-American communities, respect is considered a necessary aspect of becoming successful in life.

The research design involved ethnographic methods, including semi- structured interviews, participation, and observations of targeted trail riding clubs, ranchers, and rodeo participants in Houston, Texas. Participation in venues for horse maintenance, training, and competitions facilitated rapport building with Black cowboys. I started by contacting organizers of black rodeo events to request participation in my study and, if successful, I asked for references of other people they knew who might be interested in talking to me about black western culture. The initial interview was designed to establish boundaries around membership and belonging. This allowed me to discuss definitions of "cowboy" with the assumption that notions of work and authenticity lead to questions and conversations about men versus boys. This data allowed me to make comments about patriarchal notions of the gendered division of labor and insert potential contrast through racialized cultural practices. I interviewed people until I identified one or more individuals whom I would like to be key informants on black ranchers, black trailriders, and black rodeo cowboys. All other interviews were used to supplement the narrative or provide contrast to black male experiences in the western world.

My background facilitated engagement with data and analysis from the perspective of a subjective researcher trained to balance "insider" (-emic) and "outsider" (-etic) perspectives. My observations as a researcher were informed by personal experience and theoretical foundations on my research topic. Interviews allowed me to go beyond the theoretical foundations of my research and move toward the perspectives that challenge notions and representations of black experience in the United States. Interviews add multi-volcality to my project by elucidating notions of Black identity in

the United States as something that cannot be essentialized. This ethnographic method of participant observation and semi-structured interviews also introduces reflexivity and multiple intersections of data collection and analysis that informs my interpretations via collaboration and critique. More specifically, the African (-American) oral tradition of call and response (verbal and non-verbal) is both a performative act that I can use as a heuristic device and a research tool to participate and observe the interactions between black cowboys in black western spaces.

Black cowboys relate to each other based on shared experiences and identities. Because of the reflexive nature of participant observation, I will also use semi-structured interviews with black cowboys. These interviews allow me to ask detailed questions about my observations of how southern black males relate to each other in various ways. An example of this interaction is the oral tradition that is observable in African-American cultural traditions and the conversations that these black cowboys have with each other during and after they are done with the maintenance of their horses. Other sources of information for my research include archival research at the American Cowboy Museum, The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, and the African-American Library at the Gregory School.

Limitations

The black western community is large but it doesn't feel that way because trail rides bring people together in different kind of way than rodeos. As I've heard one trail rider mention, it's like one big family reunion every weekend. Most people who participate in other black western practices seem to enter into the culture through trail

riding, which makes the community seem small. Everybody seems knows who everybody is, what they do, and where they fit within the range of "real" cowboy abilities.

Here I was a year and half into data collection, sitting in the back of a truck being interviewed by someone I considered a main voice in my project. He said, in a questioning tone of surprise "so you know Ron?!" It really wasn't a question so much as a statement of surprise and interest. I said "yep" and told him that Ron introduced me to a lot of people when I first started my project and didn't know where to go and find people to interview. Then he said "so y'all dated?" I said "no" and laughed but at that moment I realized something. My thought was "here we go again." By this time I had already been asked if I had a boyfriend, husband, or kids to which I said "no, no, and no."

While he was interested and somewhat amused by my acquaintance with Ron, he either didn't believe my answer to this question or he questioned my honesty in general. He asked me a total of three times after this instance. I realized that this line of questioning was something I had experienced a number of times before and, now, I can say that it happed many times after this one. At first I felt uncomfortable than I was excited because it was a pattern and patterns meant data. Carl still expected that Ron and I had dated even after I told him "no." For the rest of the night he was trying to show me a real campout and trail ride but everybody had gone to sleep except 5 people.

One camper had a few people still sitting around a fire that was being put out when we pulled up and a lady selling food, drinks and candy out of a trailer that she

converted into mobile food stand. As we sat in his friend's pickup truck waiting for the chicken wings to finish frying they talked to each other and every now and then asked me questions about myself, where I came from, and who I already knew from my previous fieldwork. Carl said that he didn't see Ray's truck which, I thought I had seen his truck but, I wasn't going to say anything. I spent most of this time listing to hem talk about everybody I had met over the past year, half of the people I knew, he seemed to know well. Later I realize that a number of people mentioned that Carl was someone I need to talk to, while I was doing my M.A. fieldwork.

Up to this point, I thought nothing of this line of question, at least until I heard "I want you to be my woman." This pattern of behavior didn't bother me because my formal training in doing anthropology taught me that these kinds of relationships were unethical, or at least increased the possibility of me going rogue in the field. One thing I knew was nothing was going to get in the way of me finishing my research. To, my purpose was very clear and simple. This pattern however, proved to become a challenge that revealed some obstacles that I had not previously noticed.

There were many instances where different participants would stop calling me or returning my calls as I rejected their advances for a romantic or strictly sexual relationship. One specific instance comes to mind when one of my participants told me that he could not talk to me anymore because he could not "deal" and "this was too much." At this moment I had arrived to point where, at no other time prior to this conversation, I felt like in these instances there was a sense of ownership of me among my participants. I also felt like I was being broken up with, yet again and this was a very

weird feeling and situation to navigate. My conversation with this particular cowboy led me to believe that he has come to a realization that I was really interested in his social-cultural world and not interested in being his woman. I question why someone would feign interest in a cultural practice as a tactic to achieve a romantic relationship. But, it happens every day. Having experienced this with other participants, I felt partly responsible for him feeling like his effort to show me his world and sharing certain stories, which I discuss in detail was, to him, part of some courting process that did not go the way he had hoped.

These are the kinds of interactions, frustrations, and considerations that I found particularly challenging. My experience is best captured in a text conversation that I has with a friend who was starting his second graduate program at a different university. He was having issues with methods and reached out to me and we began to workshop some of the things I was facing at the time.

> Myeshia: My research/relationship with participants is like one "break up" after another when they realize I'm not trading what they want for information. The dilemma for me is can/should text messages be fair game for data.
>
> Lawrence: Explain the situation in more detail to me please, what happened, what they said
>
> Myeshia: Participants have romantic interest or sexual expectations and after so many rejections they realize I'm serious about the separation of personal and professional. Then they either stop

calling me with info or just say hey I'm done this is too much to deal with

Lawrence: My first impulse is to say no...'cause you know they hoping the messages will be a way in... You don't want to have anything like this associated with your PhD research. If it is too much for them to deal with they aren't suitable subjects then... maybe next time address this upfront, make it clear exact what it will take and what you expect and what you don't want

Myeshia: Yeah but my research is on black masculinity...if I have trouble interviewing a number of people at a time because the community is so small that everybody knows somebody that knows the person who has agreed to be a participant then all the black male cowboys back off because of some guy code. One, it's not that kind of party. Two, It's relevant to masculinity/manhood in some way.

Lawrence: Yeah, from an objective perspective- which is not what you will be getting...Get a separate phone, tell them that you have to keep a record of all communications. If they still want to text do it, actually keep a record and records from the phone company too

Myeshia: Ugh. This is crazy.

Lawrence: Use that phone for all communication with your subjects, that way you can even study things like communication patterns etc...

Keep it separate from your personal life. And keeping the record will make sure you don't allow yourself to cross the line

Lawrence: I couldn't imagine studying female sexuality of young Hispanic women without having sex with them.... lol... that probably is actually the best way, but ethically...

Myeshia: Exactly.

Lawrence: You must be ethical... you can do your own personal study later

Myeshia: I'm not studying sexuality. However, it's there and I wonder if that's because of my presence or if these guys talk this way about females when I'm not around. If not, they are very bold and open to say some of the things I've been "fortunate" to hear as they "bird watch."

Lawrence: Don't feel sad though dear, this is all part of it, the learning experience. Think of this as a challenge to overcome, to help you grow as a person and a researcher... you can do this!

Myeshia: I can't exactly mirror what they do because that creates a different impression. There's no way to do what the Romans do when in Rome because, as a female, I can't blend in that way.

Lawrence: You don't have to mirror... you just have to make them comfortable enough to be themselves while still being ethical

Myeshia: I've tried that. Making men feel comfortable to be themselves is what creates the romantic interest. From what I see, men don't like

going through the hoops of being extra performative to get/have/keep a female's attention. BUT with me, I come with interest just not the tailor made kind. Like if I was not researching masculinity all the hoops would be there and then some.

Lawrence: Maybe you should challenge their masculinity and see how they respond...If the relationship gets to a breaking point pushback, challenge them don't just accept it and move....If they say it's too much for them ask them to clarify, ask them what they can't handle or what they are afraid of...

Myeshia: They get uncomfortable. At first it's "WTF I thought you was some wholesome churchgoing girl" then it's funny like OK there's layers to this girl let's play, do you like females...etc. Then after that it's like I'm not interested anymore but in a romantic kind of way. So somewhere in there the wholesome girl is a potential mate who is smart working on a PhD then it turns into I want her...

Lawrence: I think you are thinking that all interactions should go well or will end well, remember you are concerned with collecting data and understanding them, I think this is all part of it. I think you should make this part of your project... sexuality and gender identity are tightly coupled...

Myeshia: Agreed. This kind of thing is on the micro level. Generally it's a pattern. I wouldn't mind if other black male cowboys didn't see my

interactions with one of their buddies as making me off limits. This is effin' up my rate of data collection.

Lawrence: Lol... be persistent, pursue them ;)

Myeshia: I can see my methods section now. A year of a thousand (or #of participants) break ups.

Lawrence: Lawrence: Lol 😟 you'll be fine... emotionally it may be hard, I think that's part of it, is that the rejection is hurting you? You will probably interact with more guys for this project than you ordinarily would...You will get rejected a lot, learning to separate your feeling from your desire to gain knowledge will be hard

Myeshia: I hate knowing from the first explanation that nothing I'm saying matters. I'm being sized up for their own purpose and because I want my data I can't/won't say no never mind you won't be a good participant. So I already know or can reasonably expect feelings to turn…

Lawrence: OK

Myeshia: …indifferent or something

Lawrence: That's normal though, Myeshia...

Myeshia: However, I feel like I'm responsible for that…and I am... kind of...I think.

Lawrence: How do you mean?

Myeshia: I feel like because I know, or once I know, a person has other things on his mind and may or may not be using my research to keep me around, I'm responsible for how he feels because I'm not going to reciprocate. Again a chain of events I've experienced enough to expect. I do regularly explain what my research is about and what I'm looking at in human interactions.

Lawrence: But how many of them do you honestly expect will care about anthropology?

Myeshia: I don't use fancy words [by "fancy" I'm referring to anthropological jargon] like that. I explain my project enough to convey how the things they say and do as black males/black cowboys are exactly what I'm studying.

Lawrence: It's not about the words... it's about the entire concept of studying other people. To many people that may seem like a joke, a game, nothing serious

Doing anthropology and navigating these experiences made me feel like I was being a pseudo friend. Cultural anthropologists genuinely care about human conditions and this, in part, facilitated my entry into their lives. I'm not so sure that we can accurately explain what we are doing and how that may impact these people to adequately diminish feeling of being misled. I was conscious of ways that I might offend or create a bias because I didn't want people mirroring me and I definitely don't want people feeling like I'm judging them because we didn't agree. At no other point had I felt

like instances where my participants felt like they owned me cold be a discussion about my own identity as a limitation.

Data Analysis

In 2002, social anthropologist, Frederik Barth, contributed to processes for the way we analyze data to develop an ethnography of knowledge production, in "An Anthropology of Knowledge." This model was inspired by the work of anthropologist Sidney Mintz on inequality, racism, and ethnicity but developed as a departure from this narrow focus. Barth's takes a broader view of Mintz's work, looking at comparative perspectives of human knowledge to argue that "knowledge always has three faces: a substantive corpus of assertions, a range of media representation, and a social organization (Barth 2002)." I have applied this model to analyze the data I collected through participant action research— participant-observations, semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, audio recordings, and video recordings.

According to Barth, "in different traditions of knowledge these faces will interrelate in particular ways and generate tradition-specific criteria of validity for knowledge about the world (Barth 2002)." This view supports my method of collecting data to develop an ethnography supported by intertextual representations as prescribed by my theoretical foundations in the black existential tradition. Barth furthers his argument by highlighting one implication for this way of outlining a trajectory of knowledge production as

> a relativism in which we can demonstrate how already established thoughts, representations, and social relations to a considerable extent

> configure and filter our individual human experience of the world around us and thereby generate culturally diverse world views (Barth 2002).

The framework of analysis that I followed, as outlined by Barth, came with some cautions about dealing with "a substantive corpus of assertions," or what I understood to be generalizable, often taken as commonsense, or passively accepted as true statements about the way things are. Barth says that

> stock knowledge varies greatly between persons. It shows staggering ethnographic diversity among local human populations; it varies socially among adults within such populations; and of course, it varies developmentally, form the limited emotional registry and motor and voice control of infants to complexity of insights, information, and repertoire of adults (Barth 2002).

I accept Barth's comments on the way "stock knowledge" functions within a social organization. However, I also think that its variability can be cited as the catalyst for innovation in the way knowledge is produced and represented. This perspective comes from the way in which black cowboys have conceived of the way they expressed blackness in western cultural spaces and practices. This has added to the variability of stock knowledge, although not popular in representation. His claim from this point is that "we can greatly advance our anthropological agenda by developing a comparative ethnographic analysis on how bodies of knowledge are produced in persons and populations in the context of the social relations that they sustain (Barth 2002)." I agree.

I made observations and notes at sites where one of the three western cultural practices I cover here were taking place— a ranch, rodeos, and trail rides. At each location, I noted the geographic proximity to the city (class and money) and demographic information about event participants versus audience members (where applicable). I conducted face-to-face, semi-structured and unstructured interviews to create a framework of definitions for the term "cowboy" and the way it is used within this western folk community. I started these interviews by asking "what is a cowboy? And what does it mean to be a cowboy?" As expected, the answers I received varied and with this information I began to shift my focus to areas, at a rodeo, that were reserved for cowboys. I made more detailed notes about what kinds of things the cowboys did before the start of a rodeo or each rodeo event. For example, I made note of behaviors that appeared to be rituals or habits to bring good luck while competing. I also noticed different styles of dress (western versus non-western, brand name versus generic, etc.), visible condition of the horses (does the horse look healthy or "po'?" (Poor/malnourished/underweight)), and how the cowboys interacted with each other before and after competition.

One of the key contributions of anthropology is the ability to reveal the difference between what people say they do and what their actions reveal as a translation of their ideas. To minimize the distance between an event and its analysis I collected and analyzed data as the project was on going. The intertextuality of my data allowed me to make connections between different pieces of information that contributed to the way knowledge about black masculinity was conceived and reproduced for social

transmission among cowboys. I created a framework for classifying the information that was presented through the different forms of text— written, verbal, and embodied. Interview data, verbal communication, social interactions and embodied performances were audio or video recorded and coded for patterns in content, context, and time.

As I spent more time in black western spaces, I began to "run into" some of the same people at a western cultural practice different from where we originally met. Meeting someone in different contexts from where we were first introduced built or strengthened the relationship and my access to insider information. One of the many benefits of showing up to different black western culture events was being able to see them perform a different version of what black western looks like and I was also different. I had grown in my understanding that not only are western cultural practices significantly different from each other but what it means to be a cowboy varies in terms of form and content that has implication for authenticity.

The point at which creating meaning and how these individual meanings manifest in the interactions between black cowboys became the start of how I would illustrate knowledge production. This prompted me to start shifting the kinds of questions that I asked to move towards the data I needed to develop a narrative about knowledge production among black cowboys. I began to ask questions about personal experiences, motivation, and beliefs. The information I received came in the form of personal experience narratives, anecdotes, jokes, and tales.

My coding process content proceeded with a review of data for keywords, categories, and themes in multiple rounds. In each successive round of coding, I looked

for more general classificatory information. My final round of coding was a review for concepts that would allow me to construct a narrative about how (Black) cowboys, as ranchers, rodeo cowboys and trail riders, interpret their masculinities among each other. In used classificatory information to make locate embodied examples of themes, concepts, and categories.

The importance of the context for my data and the context within which my data was collected contributed to my analysis of embodied performances of race, gender, and notions of black masculinities. The performatives of social and cultural identities formed the elements to which each type of citational practice revealed cohesion or a breakdown in the discursive processes. Amy Hollywood, in her book, "Performativity, Citationality, Ritualization" describes the breakdown in two different forms of discursive forms as creating "gaps and fissures [that] mark the multiple sites on/in which the contestation of regulatory norms occurs (2002: 94). Over time I noticed that in different contexts some of the same topics would come up but they would be defined in a different way by the same person.

Interpreting demographic data as one mode of representing cowboys in western culture is also broadly defined by and through the positionality of the horse. There are some ranchers who participate in rodeo competitions and trail rides just as some trail riders participate in rodeo competitions. Not all cowboys are farmers and/or ranchers just like not all rodeo cowboys and trail riders discretely practice and experience their respective western cultural practices. Rodeo cowboys' use of horses for work to perform at a competitive standard is another example of differing horse positionalities.

Conversely, some cowboys use horses for farm and ranch work and others use horses for competition/sport. There is another cowboy "type" whose use of horses is symbolic. Trail riders, whose claim to the title "cowboy" is contestable by the "types" of cowboys, use horses for "play," as opposed to work/labor, and is one symbolic aspect of (Black) western cultural representations.

Time was another important tool for analyzing narrative data for similarities and differences between reoccurring topics, themes, concepts, and categories in relation to context. After asking my participants to provide an initial understanding, or definition, of a cowboy I would continue collecting narratives and making notes about my own experiences. Over time, I passed their tests and gained their trust by sharing information about who I am, what I was doing and why. Eventually I was accepted into their space and more conversations would be initiated by the cowboys. I would take the opportunity to ask the question – "what does it mean to be a cowboy?" – in a different way.

As the context of my interviews or conversations shifted, I would get new definitions that focused on a different aspect of the person's experiences. Only once did someone mention that they had already answered that question for me. I acknowledged that I had asked them for this definition two times before and that both times they gave me a different answer which was fine because I'm going to accept them all. He paused to think about what I said and offered yet another definition of a cowboy. My analysis revealed a framework for translating notions of authenticity about race and gender in black western culture as these definitions changed variably to highlight stereotypes of both race and gender in the way a cowboy looks and behaves.

Data Interpretation

The data I collected to construct a narrative about knowledge production among black cowboys started with a humanistic approach. I started by creating a map of the social terrain through making observations, taking notes, and conducting face-to-face, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. My purpose here was to develop a general sense of who's who in the black western community. What I mean by this is that I started with the assumption that the cowboy was static while western cultural practices vary. These notions contributed to the way I conceptualized my landing site as the starting point, or data point, on a map from which I would make various connections and distinctions between black western masculine performances[27]. Through the interview process I began to think about my landing site as a central point of reference, or nucleus, to which outer rings, or layers revealed a relationship that was foundational[28].

Exploring the way black masculinity is understood in theory and embodied among cowboys builds primarily on the theoretical and discursive intersection of foundations for performing racial identity using Tavia Nyong'o's, "Racial Travesty: Minstrelsy in the Circum-Atlantic Fold" and Joanna Bosse's "Whiteness and the Performance of Race in American Ballroom Dance." The importance of focusing on

[27] Looking at black masculine practices in the rodeo setting versus, the ranch, versus the trail ride.
[28] To some extent this view is useful for analyzing my data interns of relationships between generations of cowboys. Not by design I just happened to meet the man who ran the oldest and largest black rodeo in Texas at this rodeo, his family legacy rodeo, started by his daughter. I later found out that many of the black ranchers and many of the aspiring pro rodeo cowboys have some connection, affiliation, or view this family as their extended family, all the main voices in this paper were mentored/worked for the father at some point in their teens and early twenties and grew up with his children.

Black-American, racialized, identity was to capture the linguistic function of the hyphen between "Black" and "American." I achieved this by doing three things.

First, I focused in the contemporary moment. This means that all my participants are several generations removed from experiencing and seeing immediate family members experience struggles associated with coming to a new country as slaves. Second, some of my participants have experienced some upward mobility, thus allowing them, at times, to dis-identify with being the stigma of blackness as an identity that has class status implications. Third, my participants' cumulative experiences afford them the confidence to adopt "the" American identity as an unmarked category in very specific situations. Considered in sum, each of these tactics allow me to present examples of embodied black masculinity that are informed by social and cultural capital of two distinct racial groups – southern and western— that stand in opposition to each other and have produced a third space from which to identify that suggests continual constant negotiation between the two.

Through many conversations and active observations, eventually, I could see how "not every man with a horse is not a cowboy" because of the work or labor he does with the horse. Now, I have learned how the difference between a rodeo cowboy, rancher, and trail rider are cowboys in different contexts which signal a masculinity is being embodied in terms of work versus labor in black masculine development towards becoming a "real" man ("real" cowboy). Put simply, the "real" – rancher and rodeo — cowboys would not acknowledge trail riders as "real" cowboys because of very

subjective and particular masculine notions of (hard) work. Some Trail riders will disagree.

Ethical Dilemmas

As it is currently presented, sans ethical considerations, that minority researcher may consider, postmodern perspectives are underpinned by colonialist views of personhood. Before we unpack the meaning of this and the ethical dilemmas it can facilitate let me explicitly situate black cowboy within the purview of my methodological trajectory for this project. The way in which I approach masculinity among black cowboys manifests in the validity of multiple perspectives and narratives about blackness and masculinity as cowboys. The ethical dilemmas I find with taking this view wholesale is that when the postmodern theorists were innovating new ways of understanding and interpreting human subjectivities. That is, within social and cultural experiences, people of African descent were not part of the considerations for a model of the postmodern subject. To me, this means that the utility of these models is, while fruitful, quite limited in helping me translate social and cultural cues into something more relatable if not generally understandable and therefore furthering a more socio-political agenda for the way representations of black masculinity are reproduced.

Therein lay the ethical dilemma and my decision to seek foundations that start with Black experiences to develop a model for exploring black experiences. Acknowledging black existentialism, which brings a central focus to black being, as opposed to the intended subject(ivity) found in the scholarship of early postmodernist scholarship. A discussion on personhood would be beneficial here but is not necessary to

point to the ethical dilemmas that arise, for me, with respect to drawing boundaries, acknowledging and making explicitly visible the work which influenced the progressions of my inquiry in the world of black men and masculinity.

As a black researcher who has carried my blackness into the field, I made no attempt to be objective. I believe objectivity is something we aspire to be. In that process we achieve what we call "neutrality" only when we perceive there to be nothing at stake or we can accept the conditions around differing perspectives. Armed with my blackness, which there is no shortage of ways that I express, I see my participants for the people that they are. To me, they are not objects that science has made them out to be in studies like the Tuskegee experiment. It is equally important to consider the ramifications for inquiring about someone's personal life and potential triggers for that person, although this research has little to no impact on the health and wellbeing of the participants.

Conclusions

After about 18 months of participating in rodeos of various sizes and classifications, trail rides of marked distinctions, and countless hours spent with a black rancher whose property, I scratched the surface of socially and culturally defined networks that inform the rules governing black western identities and black western masculinities. These distinctions are loosely hinged on group and individual notions of racialized stereotypes about blackness, regional notions of blackness, and gendered work versus labor among contemporary black cowboys. During the time I spent getting to know my people in different social settings, there were subtle and not so subtle moments

when I would see someone encounter a new group of people, or "strangers," and had to decide to be friendly or reserved depending on initial observations of the social environment. The ways that I behaved in different social settings were guided by my curiosity and expressed concerns for my safety as a female in these male dominated spaces. In each situation, I used a method of trial and error to see if or how the cowboys would negotiate my presence. Other lessons that I learned through trial and error included how to translate socio-cultural idiosyncrasies from one culture into a language that cultural outsiders may understand.

The methods we choose to walk the path of the "other" are as equally important as our many responsibilities relating to interpersonal and professional relationships. More specifically, this is my attempt to push social science into the realm of everyday interactions that influence the way we choose to be reflective about the ways we study and what we choose to study as social cultural interactions to advance knowledge and solve human problems. One of the outcomes for this narrative is to exemplify how everyday interactions influence what and how social scientists choose to study. Another example is how we employ reflexive strategies that advance knowledge and solve human problems in similar ways that our participants try to negotiate through social interactions every day. Black cowboys are an exemplar of these challenges and this is how I will explore the socio-cultural significations of this race/gender nexus among black males in contemporary North American culture and society.

For the cowboys, opportunities to learn by trial and error almost always resulted in some lesson shared with elders and peers about their personal experience with *this*

horse or *that* man, *this* girl or *that* place. However, the challenges and consequences of my own ignorance, which led to deviations from what was expected of me as a black female, would not result in punitive sanctions against me. Although, there were times when I had to evaluate whether it was wise to push past the unwritten but mutually understood boundaries (and expectations) around myself as a female in male dominated spaces, but that came later.

CHAPTER IV

CULTIVATING BLACK (COW)BOYS

The morning of my first day out on a black owned and operated ranch was to watch cow castrations. I found humor in how my exploration of black masculinity began with an invite to witness men gathering together to remove the testicles of male cows—bulls. I haven't decided if the metaphor here is just dark humored irony. Anyhow, I got there early and waited for at least 45 minutes to later find out that the start time had been moved back. Some of the people who were supposed to be there were still in church and

Figure 18. Cowboys warming up their horses in preparation for the Legacy Rodeo in Madisonville, TX.

needed extra time to go home and change clothes. While I waited for the rest of the crew to arrive, I introduced myself to Walter and his son who were also standing around waiting for the work day to start. Walter had a lot to say about his life as a bull rider, the lessons he is teaching his sons about black western culture, and his feelings about life after rodeoing.

Walter's account of how he became involved in western culture represents a good amount of the experiences that many of the trail riders and weekend rodeo cowboys shared with me while I was out at trail rides. As a representation of the common experiences that were shared with me, their stories of growing up a black boy in the 'hood on the Southside of Houston, Texas are by no means exhaustive. I chose to use this conversation as an introduction to common experiences because unlike many of the weekend cowboys, more commonly referred to as trail riders, Walter made a career out of rodeoing and it became a vehicle for him to go beyond city limits and state lines to experience other cultures. Later, I'll introduce you to Cam who is one of few professional rodeo cowboys who is also a black man that mobilized western culture as the vehicle to take him across the U.S. Both men have different points of view and experiences as cowboys in the rodeo world. This shows up in the advice that they give to their mentees as well as how they choose who to mentor. They also live between cultural spaces that are not thought of as viable grounds for reimagining and representing blackness as a western cultural identity.

Between Father and Son

Walter's experiences as a black cowboy allow us to follow his professional involvement in western culture as a black man, his participation in black western culture as a cowboy, and life after his retirement from rodeoing where he cultivates the development of his sons and other youth in the western community. He initially identifies himself as a well-traveled professional rodeo cowboy in bareback riding. This is important because he was first introduced to western culture as a young boy through friends who invited him to participate in trail rides. Later, he makes a significant distinction between the types of people who have a western profession versus trail riding. The distinctions he makes suggest classifications of masculinity that point to levels of maturity and authenticity as a man and as a "real" cowboy. These distinctions are strongly suggestive of classism within the community. The conversations typically consist of comparing white rodeo to black rodeos. See figure 19 for an example of a black rodeo tour schedule.

> Walter: My name is Walter and I started bareback riding when [I was a young man] and I've been around the world— S. Dakota, N. Dakota, Colorado, Utah, Kansa. You name it, I been there. 16 years of rodeoin', my hobby is bareback riding. The reason why I started riding bareback horses I started riding a lil jack during the trail riding time. They use to bring a jack out and they would make everybody put up $5, $10 dollars just to ride the jack. And from there I went from riding jacks to riding broncs. Been around the world, went to Japan and back riding bareback horses.

> What got me started was I started off, I had a friend of mines had…they use to do trail riding and I came up in the neighborhood of Fourth Ward
>
> which was downtown [Houston]. And the trail ride use to come through every year and we use to ride bicycles behind 'em and I always wanted to ride a horse. Well nobody would let us ride a horse but a friend of mine and them had one they say hey man yeah go ahead and ride. They say, "you need to tell yuh mom and them [to] get you a horse." Well my mom was too poor for us to get a horse so I started workin' and I finally bought me a horse. And uh, from there went on with it. I had a friend of mine, a old man of mine, his name was Robert (White or Wyatt) and they use to ride every weekend and he use to always take me with him and they would let me ride one of their horses. And that's where I started way down in Navasota; the whole entire yards. Feedin' em, what to feed, take care of em, and what to look for, if yuh horse is sick; some of the main points just taking care of an animal.

Walter's awareness of the disproportionate lack of representation of blacks in western culture allowed him to take advantage of this situation. He took it as an opportunity to insert an alternate depiction of blackness. I can only imagine the feeling of being in a moment where my presence and the significance of my identity as a representation of an iconic figure in national culture has the potential to shift paradigms and possibilities for diverse groups. Whether intentional or accidental, I'm sure his

presence and proximity to people who've probably not seen the likes of a black cowboy previously had profound impacts on what is possible in the way of shifting perspectives about identity formation. The road to shifting paradigms about western culture as constitutive of a black cultural practice is one that, I think, requires a targeted focus and intentional actions meant to illustrate borrowing and adapting cultural practices as opposed to mimicking another group.

> Walter: When I was comin' up it was always us, you never seen black cowboys. It was always the white cowboys, uh no no black cowboys. and right now, in Chicago, Illinois only thing they know of is John Wayne so when the black cowboys come to Chicago it's like "Oh man I never seen this here." yuh know and we gave a whole bunch of autographs and talk to kids about the do's and the don'ts. And right now, I work with my son and a whole bunch of other kids in the youth rodeo in Fresno (Texas) and they are now gettin' the habit of seeing what cowboyin' is all about. Everybody thinks cowboyin' is all easy work. Cowboyin' is hard work. A whole lot of work.

These modes of cultural change occur when people come into contact with other groups who had different knowledge. He goes on to talk about meeting people in different places where they've never seen black cowboys and relates that to his own experience of seeing cowboys that did not look like him and how that must have felt.

Many of the rodeo cowboys that I met were active and passionate about mentorship and giving back to the community. This is why I was not surprised that Walter continued to teach his sons and other kids different lessons about life through western culture. His retirement from rodeoing and finding a new way to employ his time in western culture allowed him to see generational changes and shifts in the way western culture was being perceived, interpreted, and practiced in this new era. Like many of the other cowboys in his generation, Walter shared his opinion about this too.

> Walter: Well, the young generations don't know anything about cowboyin'. The only thing they know is getting up on a horse riding down the street drinkin' and doing whatever. That's not cowboyin'. Cowboyin' is when you have to break horses, and that's what I do. Uh, we break horses and you gotta get busy with 'em not just one head, we talkin' bout like 5 or 6 heads. It's a lot of tension in there, it's a lot of pain in there uh, if you're not ready for the pain, don't come and play with this game here. This is all about pain, you know, uh, it's a lot of work a lot of fence work a lot of cattle work you can't get a youngster to say we gon get up at 5 o'clock in the morning we gotta go work cows, they not gon do that. When I was in Illinois, we got up at 4 o'clock in the morning and worked over a thousand acres of land fixin' fence, working cows, tendin' to young colts that are on the ground. Some cults that are not even born yet hangin' out they mommas so you had to help 'em out.

> Some calves that are still hangin' also outta they mommas you had to pull 'em out make sure the calf was up on its feet in two days and mostly just a bunch of work. It's all about work. It's not play, when you get off of that horse in the evening time you want off. You know 8 hours in that saddle and most of the time we do more than 8 hours in the saddle.

While many of the professional cowboys and ranchers I spoke to share similar views about "real" cowboys versus trail riders, a lot of them were introduced to western culture through trail riding. Many of them still participate in trail rides. While I was out at different trail riding events, I noticed that in the evening, when a trail ride is in full

Figure 19. Trail rider on a makeshift wagon with a cooler on the back

swing, the children will practice their skills and techniques performed in rodeos as a form of entertainment and play. Every so often, an adult will walk over to where the kids are and offer words of encouragement or help and critique what a kid is doing before walking off to visit with other people.

This is where Walter and, possibly, the other retired rodeo cowboys have found another purpose to serve in western culture. In this way the development of the social lifecycle is coming full circle. As Walter sees it, the time has come to pass the torch to the next generation but it doesn't happen without its own set of challenges; cultivating black boys into black men in the contemporary moment.

Myeshia: How can you spot a cowboy from a trail rider?

Walter: First thang you do is you go over there and you look at what he's riding in and how it's sittin' up on. A trail rider wouldn't pack his saddle like this here [pointing to the equipment on his horse] the equipment that's on it. This is a lot of equipment that's sittin' on this horse. Your trail riders ride with something that's just something real, real light. Uh, no work to the animal. You look at your animals on your cowboys, most of your work is solid, uh, your animal is in shape. Trail riders, their horses are maybe narrow, poor, uh they only come out on the weekend they feed once a week. Uh, you say you having a big ride or something then they wanna push everything into that animal, then they taking a chance of killin' it. It doesn't take a whole lot to kill an animal. All it takes is one grain, one grain that's not right you can be mildewed and that's it he's out of here.

> I can also tell you this about your cowboys, feel my hand. You feel the texture to it? Feel that. That's hard right? You feel a trail rider's hands his hands are soft. All cowboys' hands are hard. Because they, I mean it's the roughness to it. Some people that don't prove that they're a cowboy. But when you get the breaks and the leg breaks and the arm breaks and stuff, it doesn't scare you from it. It make you wise enough to say, "I'm not going to do that no' mo'"

For a "real" cowboy, western clothes serve a functional purpose and this is how a skilled professional will assess authenticity versus someone who is new to the western scene. Walter walks me through how looking the part of a cowboy is only one indicator and shows me how positionality is also key for spotting the "real" from the pretend of inexperienced cowboys. For example, spurs are part of the cowboy's western attire but you don't necessarily have the need for spurs at a trail ride when you're walking around the campgrounds visiting people, sampling their food, and pouring yourself a drink at each trailer or tent you walk to. From Walter's perspective he would say that:

> Trail riders— they don't know anything about that. None what so ever. They do but it's a lot to the boot wear stuff you know, most of your cowboys, you can tell their boots are going to be totally different. Their heels on their boots they gon mostly have they rough boots something that they know they ain't gon worry about scarin' 'em up. The heels of the boot are solid and hard so you don't get bone spurs in yuh heels. They'll [the Trail riders] go and buy a pair of "fat baby's" and think that's about it. And

they'll go put some spurs on it and then their heels are hurtin. They trying to figure out why their heels are hurting. Because your spurs are too tight on your heels. They don't even know the reason why they have the spurs on they feet. They just have 'em on for the dress you know. That's a piece of equipment that you have on your feet that automatically tell they horse "I wanna go right." You don't have to pull that horse to the right. If you bump that horse its goin' to the right.

Myeshia: Is there any tension that "real" cowboys feel when…well it's seems like you have to earn the title "cowboys"

Walter: Yes. Let me say it like this here, uh, [Merdis Dikeman], (Another name in audible), these are old cowboys [Rayfield Kids] and you can listen to the names, you had one called "Slits," "A.J. Bailey," "Jimmy Simeon (???)," "Robert Wakcoff," "Charlie Sleville," "Don Goodman," all these here are cowboys these are flat cowboys I mean go get it cowboys. Uh, can't, I couldn't put uh somebody that don't know anything about a horse and say hey we finna go and work cattle a day. And then they don't know anything about cattle, they don't know if to run in, to get off, to back off, or come in. But then you got your hands and that's what they're called, they're called "hands" when you got your hands they gon get that stock done they know they got to get in and do this job and then it's over with. Uh, but back to what I was sayin' on Murdis an' then, when we was comin' up, they wore white shirts. For us to wear a white shirt, we had to go to them and

say, “is it ok if we wear a white shirt?” because they was a head of us we had to get their permission to wear that white shirt to be honored as a cowboy. You had to almost like say hey uh I’m tryin’ to get your permission to wear that white shirt.

Myeshia: What did it mean?

Walter: White shirts mean that you was a hand. Top hand.

Myeshia: Ok

Walter: Yes! Very top hand.

Myeshia: So, there’s uh, different levels?

Walter: Yes! Uh, right now, around here are three generations of cowboys. You got the old cowboys that came up in the (19)50’s, that are still around, some of ‘em are still around. Then you got from your 50’s, well I’ll go back and say yuh 70’s cowboys, those are hands. What you got right now, you got some cowboys that are in there. Some young cowboys that are in there that are comin’ up right now but you can tell your old cowboys from them because they wear their pants all baggy. They wear their pants baggy and we wear our pants just a lil snug. Why we wear our pants snug is because when a animal makes that move, your snugness grab hold to it and helps you out in that seat. And they don’t realize that.

Myeshia: So, what are some of the things you try to teach you sons?

Walter: Well I take ‘em back to letting them know that black cowboys came from a long history but they never put, they never say anything about the black

> cowboys its always the white cowboys did this here. And it's mostly the black cowboys did the breaking of the animals back then the black man did it but he [the white man] took the honor for doing it. That's what I try to get them to understand. A whole lot of stuff that's being done we did it but we didn't get our recognition on it.
>
> Uh, the only thing I can say on that is most of your white cowboys, and don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that they are better than us or we are better than them, most of your white cowboys learn from your black cowboys that are around here. Joe Bever- world champion- everything he learned he came 'round here to the black neighborhood to learn it. Cody O'Dell, black cowboys, Fred Whitfield put him up under his shoulder and showed him everything he know.

This revelation about "us versus them" seems to drive Walter's views about the need to shift the way black men are cultivating black boys with a focus on their character as opposed to passing down black western cultural forms of "man's work." He seems to have identified a need, based on his perception of history before men were not seen as or did not see each other as cultivators of culture in the same way they were cultivators of the land and animals through farming and ranching. The exchange of service that black men provided for their white counterparts was done as, what may be considered, part of a business transaction. Then, it would seem that at some point a need for sharing this information, probably to maintain black western culture for many reasons, was realized. One of the reasons, I would say, is a cultural sense of "us versus them" and the reason

why I am able to qualify, in this narrative, black western culture versus white western culture. As part of national shifts in industry, this process may have started to occur in earnest when ranching became less prominent during the rise of the industrial revolution.

In a way, this would suggest a threat to "man's work" and simultaneously created the need to protest the culture as an iteration of black life in the United States. Consequently the shift moves some black cowboys into the space of what is regarded as feminized work in western culture. They now act as the bearers and transmitters of cultural knowledge.

Walter: So, you can't take nothing away from us. Only thing is bad about us, well I wouldn't say "bad," it's that our ancestors our people taught us exactly about cowboyin' and we passed it, we passed it, we passed it down but we didn't pass it the right way. We did stay with our, and I'm not trying to be on the prejudice side, what I'm saying is that we'll go and show the white cowboys exactly, or the kids over there this is what you need to do when we're not taking time with our own to show them exactly "hey this is what you got to go through [to be here].

Now they'll come to a rodeo yes, and they got fine horses. Most of our horses that we get are they are graded horses. And what it means by graded horses they don't have no paper line on 'em no blood line and we have to go out there we have to break em, we have to stay with that horse at least a whole year to get 'em right, where we get 'em to do what we want that horse to do.

Uh, they'll get their horses they'll take it to one of us, or one of our people, and we'll go at it and train that horse for 'em and then they'll get that (grade??) and say, "aw man what'd you do there and this and that" "well I been ropin' off this horse a long time" and ain't say nothing 'bout *who* trained your horses. Yuh understand what I'm saying?

So, the first thing you do on kids, you let them know that this animal is nothing to play with. This animal will hurt you. Period. You have to respect him. You give him respect he gon give you respect. You don't walk behind that animal at no reason no time unless you and that animal has that bond together. You have that bond, yes, not you have that bond together he knows that you're not going to hurt him and he's not gon try to hurt you. (In audible). All you have to do is ask them what you want and they'll give it to you.

Myeshia: And so, the responsibility…

Walter: The responsibility of keepin' these animals in good shape is you. Every day that you go to that barn that horse need to be brushed off, he need to be brought out of there, exercised, before he goes back up he need to be brushed again. He needs to be fed right and put up right. The next morning you come up and do the same thing over and over.

I teach my son attitude. First thing, you want attitude and respect. He has to have that. You don't have that you ain't goin nowhere. You got to have that respect. Anytime you walk up to somebody I don't wanna hear no

"Yes" it's "Yes ma'am" "No ma'am" I don't care if they your same age or whatever, "Yes sir" "No Sir" "Yes Ma'am" "No Ma'am" and he has that. All of my boys have that.

Walter: This is the way *to* be a man. This is that way *to* be a man. Uh, I'd rather my son say, "yes Ma'am" to you than to come up and say "yes" you know that's not giving you no respect for being a lady and that's my way of teaching a kid how to become a young man. I teach all of my kids at the uh at the first thing that come out of your mouth is "Yes Ma'am" "No Ma'am". I don't care what you say it's gotta come out your mouth. uh I don't wanna hear you say "yeah" when I ask you something. I want you to look at me straight in my eyes, so we have good eye contact. So that means one time only that I'm gonna tell you something and that's it.

Myeshia: Yes, in terms of rodeoing why do think the "black rodeos" are not as successful, or as well known, as some of the predominantly white rodeos?

Walter: Well you got, you got large black rodeos, don't get me wrong, you have a whole lot of large black rodeos. But they're not here in Texas. Most of em like, Oklahoma, like next weekend they have one in Oklahoma. That's a large black rodeo. They have a large one in Kansas City. One thing that (inaudible) us is money wise. We can't travel the road like some of these people does. You know they (inaudible). I had to rodeo for a week, uh 3 or 4 days, I had to come back in. What I mean by had to come back in, my money got short. Now if I was winning money I kept on going. But we

don't have nobody to back us. We don't have that money to keep us out there long enough. You got to have someone to uh have that money that paper line just to say, "ok hey look where you going", "I'm goin to Utah" and the money is already there so you're entered at Utah. From Utah, you gon' on up. You never come back.

Myeshia: So is that one of the obstacles of…

Walter: Money wise

Myeshia: people knowing that there are black cowboys

Walter: yes

Myeshia: do you have those obstacles too?

Walter: No, I have retired from rodeoin'. I does it now cause of my boys that are comin' up behind me but uh they been tryin' to get me back on bareback horses. I'm through with bare back horses, the broke wrists and the knees they hurt now. You know but uh I did that I had my fun at it. Not saying that I don't miss it, I do miss it, but I don't like going to watch a rodeo.

Myeshia: Why is that?

Walter: I'm not participating in it. And I just hate to say it like that. I just don't, I'd rather stay at the house and train horses. Set down and drank me a beer and eat me some barbecue and do what I gotta do.

Myeshia: So, it's something about being out there that's not the same as…

Walter: No, it's not the same.

By the time a black cowboy reaches this point in the life cycle of his career, there have been multiple transitions that occurred and must be taken into consideration with respect to notions of manhood as they are tied to work, or labor, and aging. The considerations here bring us to the question of how we treat people who have aged out of work or earned the right to retire from their role as contributing to the culture or society in ways they once did. My reflections focus on Walter's treatment of the limitations that nature, or biology, places on the body and how, at some point, each generation of men will have to hang up the days of challenging (mother) nature and find a more "age appropriate" role to play in the western lifestyle. This made me wonder what we are doing to our heroes and when we start to regard them as impervious. Some of this comes out through the character of Big Reach. For now, Walter's experience is more useful for bringing together the interplay between (mother) nature and nurture. Eventually biology "wins" and man simply cannot maintain his place "out" in the world taming and conquering. Eventually, as we see with Walter, he begins to emphasize his role in cultivating younger generations of cowboys.

Black Men Cultivate Their Own

Black cowboys don't elegantly fit into this schema of American masculinity that is represented by commonsense notions about race and gender norms. Tales of black cowboy figures on the western frontier of the U.S. are just as fantastical today as the ones set in the 1800s. This is a testament to the rigid boundaries set around the black male presence in western cultural spaces. The (in)visibility of black cowboys represent a

regional identity informed by particular notions of blackness making it challenging for some people to conceive ways of being black and western.

The historical record informs the type of masculinity portrayed by cowboys in popular media. Its depiction is complex in the way that characteristics associated with the hero and the outlaw are negotiated and reconciled, as typical of unmarked masculinity. This delicate negotiation of opposing characteristics is informed and influenced by the cowboy's role on the Western frontier. In the contemporary moment, what we see is how the limited development of the land affords cowboys the freedom to explore nature and question social rules that govern their behavior as men. What they don't see, because one of the many symbols represented by the cowboy, is a normalized racial masculinity that is humanizing. Black cowboys do not reconcile traditional expectations of the cowboy figure's ideal racial type. According to average notions and

standard, representations, this disconnect challenges

Figure 20. Team work getting a calf in the pen with the other cows and calves

beliefs about black masculinity. The challenge of reconciling these expectations with Stuart Hall's "the black" is rooted in how "blackness," for many people, is not associated with symbols of western culture.

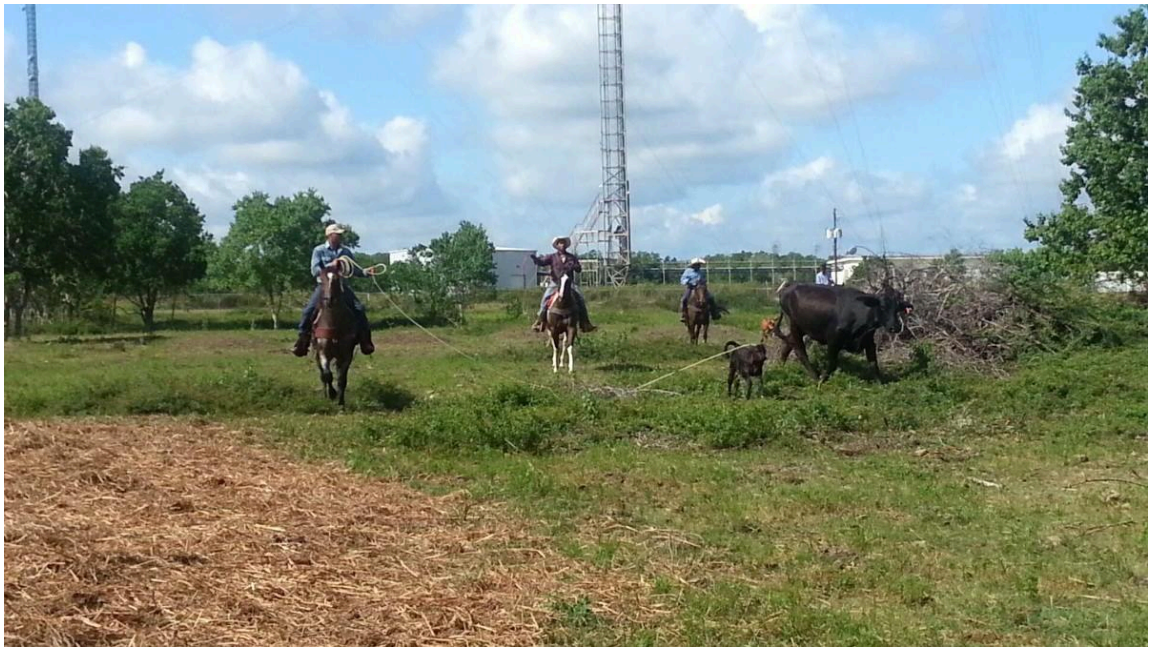

Figure 21. Two cowboys trying to separate a calf from it mother to be tagged with a number.

The work cowboys do to manipulate animals and the land attests to commonsense notions of gender and masculinity in the "wild, wild west". The challenges black cowboys face as men among men and as black men in the predominantly white western world of rodeo and ranching are particularly reminiscent of historical race relations between blacks and whites in the U.S. South. The significance of these inter-racial exchanges is worth critical consideration. However, before we look at the interplay between blackness and whiteness, we must first cross the bridge of understanding what "blackness" means in a culture informed, at least in part, by a regional context where African Americans presence is not commonly acknowledged.

My inquiry into this was guided by the following questions: Does the meaning of blackness change the further west we travel? Furthermore, how do cowboys evaluate their "blackness?" and the "blackness" of others?[29]

Labor, in this respect, is the responsibility of positively representing black culture, while showing how not all black people are the same, and exploring the privileges of multiple masculine types that are not readily available in other forums of black or normative cultural expression. "Hard work" as a characteristic of being masculine, or a man, is not juxtaposed to the sex (ualized)/gender opposite feminine or female/heterosexual. For the black cowboys presented here, "masculine" more closely refers to a level of maturity that qualifies a male to be a man (or adult male). This understanding changes the way black males interact with each other in (black) western cultural spaces. Ranchers and rodeo cowboys don't recognize trail riding as hard, "masculine" work. This explains the view that trail riders are not seen as real cowboys because they don't work or labor with their horse in the same way and trail riding is typically done as a social activity.

[29] Many of the cowboys I spoke with indicated that there are no "black cowboys" or "white cowboys;" these are just cowboys. It is people on the outside who that make the racial distinction.

CHAPTER V

COWBOY WORK AND COWBOY PLAY

One evening after I had been out on Ray's property all day, I witnessed teamwork to save a man's life. It was like a scene from a movie. It was so unreal, but it helped me understand the complexity and process of black men navigating interpersonal relationships with each other and individual notions of masculinity. I interpreted this "scene" as one instance of the culmination of a history of explicit expectations and implicit trust. When caught in a bind, one man's friends, fellow cowboys, brothers in the field, would make the "safe" decision on his behalf because pride and stubbornness would not let him cede to perceptions of competition between man and nature.

Witnessing the character development of each man as the scene unfolded to reveal who would take what role in the process of negotiating and balancing notions of masculinity with the fragility of life made me think of the phrase "my brother's keeper." The reference comes from a story in the Bible that, to me, is a lesson about responsibility to others in your community. As the biblical story goes, after Cain murders his brother Abel, God appeared and asked Cain where his brother is. Cain replied, "I know not; am I my brother's keeper (Genesis 4:9 KJV - - Bible Gateway n.d.)?" The question itself has sometimes been asked rhetorically to answer a question. In this way, the response implies that the person answering is not responsible for the person he is being asked about.

In 2014, President Barack Obama started a program, called "My Brother's Keeper," that changed the phrase's meaning to affirm the idea that we must take responsibility for the human condition of the society in which we live. Specifically, "President Obama launched the My Brother's Keeper initiative to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color and ensure that all young people can reach their full potential (My Brother's Keeper | The White House n.d.)." The broader context of how this sentiment functions, or has functioned, reminds me of the division among men based on race and the disregard of human life because of the color of a man's skin. It also reminds me of the resiliency of mankind to change symbols of disregard and indifference into something that heals and brings men closer together as the nurturers they are, or that I am arguing for here. Watching this group of men work together to contain the bull that Blue was stuck to until Ray showed up was, to me, an example of the "safety net", or support system among black men that mainstream media does not show.

Spending time getting to know these men through different interactions and their stories of growing up in western culture to how each man came to know the others, leading up to the moment when it would take all of them to save Blue from a spooked bull gave me additional insight to how a man is given the responsibility to be his brother's keeper. Trust is an important part of the process. As with everything else that I have come to learn, and relearn, trust must be earned by going through situations like this one. The "need" to have a community of people who are committed to seeing you become your best self is not enough to create the mentor-mentee relationship. There is a

level of commitment that one man has to make to another man's growth and development as a man and this is a conscious consideration, as far as I have seen during my time in their space.

The Right to be "My Brother's Keeper"

"LET HIM GO," Leon shouted with the indignation of a man convinced that he didn't need help— even if it was for his own good. Still strapped to a bucking bull, his body flailed about uncontrollably. The old man tried to jump off the bull when he started picking up speed but his left leg got caught in his stirrup. "He had a cow down," Ray explained, "It fuckin' ripped his britches off of 'em – A big long horn, king horn fuckin' cow— and them boys hollered 'Ray they got Leon down.'" The others, a group of five exhausted ranch hands, after a long day's work, wildly rode to the aid of the stubborn man who was dead set on going down with that 'ol bull. Leon had been trying to break this bull for three months now and on this particular evening he set out with his mind fixed to do just that.

By now the sun light was determined to hold on to its last few minutes of reign over the open range as it set the sky ablaze and mixed with the dust kicked up by the horses and that bull. Now this bull wasn't your ordinary bull and this man wasn't your ordinary cowboy. But we'll get to all that later— after we save the old man. "TELL HIM IM COMIN'," Ray shouted as he rode his horse out of a thick patch of trees where he was rounding up some cows that split away from the herd. He rode towards Leon and that 'Ole bull with one hand holding the reins and the other swinging his rope overhead.

Ray was looking for the right moment to release his rope and catch that bull by the horns. It took him a few attempts but he roped that 'ole cow and slowed him down long enough for one of the others to help Leon get free. After this (mis)adventure, Leon was, by all accounts, still considered to be a real cowboy, because a down cow comes with the territory. And even though Ray saved his ass a bunch of times, Leon done saved Ray's ass too.

"You shoulda let that bitch kill me, Ray," Leon yelled as he picked himself up off the ground and dusted what was left of his britches off, "I didn't want you to save me," he complained. Ray didn't pay him any mind, he would write it off and laugh saying "He ignant like that!" and would imitate Leon in a mocking tone "You shoulda let him kill me. You and that sorry motherfucker saved me."

Leon didn't always see Ray as an equal and to some extent he still isn't but, out on the ranch you must trust the men you're working with because anything can happen when dealing with animals. When they're working cows together, Leon, with 65 years of experience under his belt, certainly trusts Ray with his life. But Ray, just like any new person, who gets invited out to Ray's property, had to earn the right to that responsibility which is reinforced by demonstrating knowledge and skill. Ray trained for eighteen years before his teacher, the man Leon would call for help with a ranching job, retired and passed the baton to Ray. When I asked about this process, Ray said

> "Oh yeah, we get to the rodeo he cornered the market. 'Cause what he taught us…he brought the bulls, we were the pickup men."

Thinking out loud he asks himself, he said

Ray: "we wasn't… I was what…18, 17. Kevin, Kevin was…15, 16, 15. And we did all the pickin' up. Glover got paid for all the pickin' up and paid for the rodeo. So, this particular time, one of the bulls jumped out, run down the street. And these old men we just— me and Kevin—jumped on our horse. And this old man say, "Son now y'all just get out the way now y'all." Glover said, "you get yo' ass out. Them my boys, they know how to handle 'em."

There's a lineage that can be traced back to who taught what about dealing with cows and cattle as well as who would be trusted to look after the teachers out on the ranch when they got older and their generational peers retired or passed away. Being a black man in everyday society is challenging enough but to be trusted with another man's life in the western world it's not enough to just be a black man with a horse. A lot of people, a lot of "cowboys" don't recognize the broader significance of their presence in lives of other black men.

This experience is much different from Ray's or any of the cowboys who grew up with western culture as their way of life and lessons about life that were filtered and taught though that particular lens. Growing up in this way also influences the way gender is mobilized through language which I talk more about in chapter 6. When I asked Ray about what I assumed to be common knowledge, at least among black cowboys and men who live a black western lifestyle as they understand it, he offers a different take on new black cowboys' relationship and connection to black western history.

Ray: Oh, it's a lot of people don't know. It's a lot of people don't know it's a bunch of cowboys that don't know. These so-called cowboys they don't know who Tony Travis is. Blue know and the guys that help us down there on the ranch there know. But Tony Travis was phenomenal and we had one other guy, his name was uh, I can't leave him out the history books 'cause he is the reason well one of the reasons I know so much I know about horses. His name is Buster Thorn. He's still livin' he 80 years old. He still drank a lil beer, talk a lil noise. And I you know and I'm gon do this, I'm gonna start doing this before he dies, let me knock on wood, before he dies, but I want you to go with me, he taught me, and the things that he taught me to do I've made more money doin' what he taught me to do than I ever have on my job [in] a year- shoein' horses. He knows more about horses than a Vet[erinarian] knows.

I've been with him when I was, and I started with him was I was 8 or 9 shoein' horses with him. Yeah, I started at a young age. He took me in and had me shoein' horses. Oh, I wasn't shoein' horses…I was trimmin' 'em, 'cause he wouldn't let me shoe 'em then. I didn't get to start shoein' horses till I turned maybe 20, 21.

Myeshia: That's a long time…

Ray: Yeah, I was in training for a long time. But what he was doing was laying a format that nobody could ever say I messed up a horse 'cause he wasn't gon let me get to that point. You got a bunch of horse shoers out there that

they'll screw your horse up. 'Cause they don't know what the hell they doin'. They go to school for 6 weeks. I was in training for damn near 18 years.

I can tell you the inside out of a horse…his anatomy. You can, it's almost like a mechanic, you can call me on the phone and tell me what he doin an' I'll tell you what's wrong with him. And I have people do that. All the time. "*Ray, I know you busy, you can't get over here, but let me tell you what he doin'.*" And 99% of the time I'm right. I get to the [trail] rides or wherever I'm going, I have people horses fall out heat exhaustion and cramping and different, just small stuff, a Vet would charge you first of oh they gon' charge you $200 to come out there, another $200, you lookin' at $350 to $400 for the vet[erinarian] to come out. So, I charge 'em $100 and give the horse a shot and be done with it. Now it's up to you, you can call the vet but if you want me to look at it, I want, dealing with Black folks, I want my money right here. Give it to Blue, I know he ain't gon give it to nobody else. [Imitating Blue] "Fuck that, this Ray money," I can hear him now.

I remember when I first met Blue. When I got to Ray's place he and Blue were already roping cows. I parked my car under the big tree and started walking back towards the front gate where they were on their horses trying to herd this one cow back into the pen. As I was walking towards them I could see Ray going on the offense, trying to spook the cow into going towards Blue who would be in her way forcing her to go into trailer on her own. When that didn't work, Blue took a turn screaming "YAAA

YAAA YAAA MOVE COW." Unbothered by the yelling and wild arm waving, the cow gracefully turned her back to him and walked in the opposite direction. By this time, Ray saw me coming in the distance and waved his hat to me. I guess that's when they decided to take a break. I walked up to the side of Ray's horse and asked "Hey, what's going on here?" He said that the the cow was over by the front fence line because she was protecting her calf that wandered away.

They managed to get the calf in the trailer but I missed that part. Now they were trying to get the momma cow loaded into the trailer so they could drive her and her calf back to the pen. Blue was still on the other side of the trailer trying to get the cow to move but she wouldn't budge. After a few minutes, he walked his horse back to where Ray and I were talking. Now, I was looking up at both men still sitting on their horses. Ray was telling me how the cow was just scared and that he wishes she would just go ahead and get in the trailer because he didn't want Blue to get the cow prod to shock her.

"Who are you?" Blue jumped in to ask me. Ray, smiled wide and exhaled all the air that would otherwise have been a surprised laugh. He looked at Blue and said, "This here is the repo'ter [reporter] come to get all in my business. She's writein' a report on black cowboys." "Oh, is that right?" Blue said to Ray while he was looking at me." "I'm glad you here, I needed someone to hand me my beer. Reach down there and grab me a beer woud'ya." And that's how I was introduced to Blue. After I handed him the beer he held it out and asked me to open it for him too. He just wanted me to pull the tab on it but not open the can all the way. It was important that I didn't do all the work and open it all the way. I hadn't noticed that he was missing a couple of finger tips. I learned that

there's a lot of cowboys absent a finger, finger tips, and even limbs. It turns out that you may have the work down to a science, or even second nature, but there's no formal lesson for how to negotiate every situation and therefore, injuries occur.

Myeshia: Now, I hear you learning, and training, listening, and paying attention to all that but…

Ray: Oh yeah, for many years, but you have tuh, and these old timers like Blue and Buster and Glover, they're not teachers so you have to be educated enough, or be able to comprehend and learn enough without them bein' their teachin'…Now, Blue can teach you everything there is about trainin' a horse. Buster can teach you the anatomy of the horse. Glover know, he has more cow sense than any man in this part of the country right now. He knows cows inside out. Bulls and cows, he is the man. He-is-the- man.

[Imitating Glover] "They not gon go that way, they not gon go that way I'm tellin' you what way they goin'" But uh Buster, you can't leave him out the book he is, he shoed horses for just about everybody. Put it like this Blue wouldn't let me shoe his horses until Buster retired. That's how deep it was.

They have a bond like that…

He would let me, He knew…Blue know that Buster taught me but he would let me do, he wouldn't let me mess with them horses till he [Buster] retired. But when he retired, Blue came an'

> told…Buster came and told, he said "Now hey yuh do there… buddy you take care ah old Blue now, hear"
>
> I said, "Alright" …I said "Alright"
>
> (P. G. 2013)

I recognized that I was witnessing the interplay between the ways each man was projecting from knowledge shared by mentors from previous generation; while negotiating personal experience within the social climate of the contemporary moment. That is, they were working through notions of manhood that have since become acceptable as part of the process of getting away from traditional forms of patriarchal dominance. I felt like Leon, the seemingly stubborn old man who didn't want help because, as the more experienced man, was supposed to be strong and in control— a balance of strength and intelligence. The ways in which masculinities have been performed within this group, to me, looks like its boundaries are caught between what is decidedly natural and seemingly fixed characteristics of that which is feminine. Mapping these gendered characteristics on the physical body has translated into less effort in creating boundaries around what is masculine as opposed to feminine, of which nurturing is a part. However, if man is to take his place as the personification of human nature they seem to have taken the natural environment to task in the struggle for dominance.

When a bull starts to charge, the challenge is accepted for the cowboy to assert his power to manipulate or shift the power dynamic thereby reinforcing, at least to himself, that he is in control. To the cowboys witnessing this crisis unfold, the priority is

Leon's safety. At this point it seems like he needs saving from the bull and himself. It's like picking a fight with nature. When (mother) nature responded to provocation, his reaction was to remain headstrong possibly trusting that the others would step in and be that nurturing voice of reason. These men act as each other's opposite mirroring characteristics that would otherwise be ridiculed for being soft, weak, or feminine, unless the situation calls for a balancing agent. They defer to each other when a threat to their sense of authority is implicitly or explicitly challenged.

Ray, on the other hand, writes this off as ignorance but not the ignorance of not knowing better or different. He is referring to Leon being obstinate and, I would add, more compelled by other reasons to continue down the path he chose for getting that bull to submit to him. Remember, Leon has been trying to break that bull for three months. This background makes for a great end to a legendary journey as a black cowboy. The narrative of a man who lives by the sword and dies by the sword comes to mind here and is supported by the view that ranching is a lifestyle not just a hobby. That you can't just like it, you gotta love it. In this view, there would be no greater honor than to leave the natural world while doing the very thing you dedicated your life to. Ray has a different perspective, because of his relationship to Leon as a mentee, almost like a son.

Ray was caught in a similar situation one day while I was out recording their cattle work. His horse got spooked and started running too fast. Ray dug his heels into the horse's flanks to get him to put his rear to the grass. When the horse lowered his back-end, Ray dug his heels in the dirt as if to use his legs as manual breaks. This resulted in a sprained ankle and ripped jeans. Ray too will be out on the ranch one day

with his mentee who will be old enough to have his own mentees. This will continue the traditional cycle of having three or more generations of black cowboys taking care of each other, teaching and learning from each other, modeling how to trust, respect, and manipulate social and natural order.

Everybody Can't Do This Kind of Work

Learning how to deal with horses and cattle was only part of the training that any of these men could reasonably expect. The potential for danger when an animal gets spooked, just wants to be left alone, or becomes protective of its calves can happen at any time. Teaching someone how to respect the animal and respond when the situation becomes dangerous is also a long-term lesson in trust, appreciation, and respecting peace when working and interacting with people. Being cool, or having an even temperament is important because not possessing this quality makes a man a liability. This can become a matter of life and death. These lessons also translate to interacting with the opposite sex but are best illustrated in the context of rodeoing and teaching someone how to rope a steer. I'll detail into this more in Chapter 6.

Ray: Do you have a video camera?

Myeshia: I do.

Ray: We going to Willis [Texas] imma take you with us. We gotta bring up a hundred [head of cattle] and…just cut the volume off, 'cause Blue may say anything…or you gon' have to edit that shit cause you don't want that shit to get out there. 'Cause Blue may say something…and especially with Blue with *us*

Myeshia: Okay, here's the thing I tell everybody I understand the whole…I say power and discretion and I know how that operates. I know that just in talking, people are going to say things that they…everything that is said to me isn't going to get published. Everything, every picture, every video that I have is not going…

Ray: Well imma tell you…from that day, you may wanna get a lil bit of everything cause Molly Stevenson been trying to film us for years and we won't never…she ain't gon' never come and we ain't finsta sit up and let her film that. Shit, we ain't got time…but if you came and film it, you would have it. Its several people that done asked us to do it. They had a, actually a[n] anchorwoman wanted to come with us.

Myeshia: What happened?

Ray: She ain't gon' sit here and talk to me like you, and I ain't got time to be messin' with her. And Blue don't have enough…Blue can talk to you and I, but white folks [imitating Blue] "look here mister goddamn white man…" and that's just what he tell 'em...You might get anything from him… [Imitating Blue again] "Look here mister white man I do this shit for a living…"

I recognize that Ray is attempting to establish rules for what I should record and what I should disregard based on his own experience and understanding of how black people are exploited and negatively stereotyped. In this moment, his expressed concern is not unique to my own experiences talking to black cowboys and learning about their

way of life. These moments offer a valuable lesson about trust for people who want to represent black masculine experiences.

According to Ray, Blue is one of the best in the business when it comes to working cattle and they trust each other's judgement. There is no doubt in my mind that Ray's intentions are good when he says "just cut the volume off, 'cause Blue may say anything…or you gon' have to edit that shit 'cause you don't want that shit to get out there." On one hand, Ray trusts my vision and he wants to pay homage to where it all started for him. However, this means introducing me to his mentors - black men who grew up in a different time and generation with different struggles and rules for dealing with people.

Blue's interpersonal skills with new people don't seem to be formal and Ray feels compelled to police the representation of his mentor from the outside. The representation that I might make visible is Blue's informal, familial kind of communication style with new people. What Ray doesn't know about me is that I understand how black cultural expression isn't exactly formal in the classical sense. Black folks have their own vernacular and it conforms to certain rules that some cultural outsiders do not understand. Ray's attempt at censoring Blue's voice and policing my work is meant to protect Blue's image from potentially being decontextualized and represented in a negative way. His warning that "Blue may say something…and especially with Blue with *us*" is his way of saying that he has vouched for me and Blue will accept me but with that acceptance comes all the social graces of a cowboy in his element.

Despite Ray's interest in me censoring the voice that he gave to his friend and mentor, as an example of how not to represent black cowboys, what I hear is that 'Ol Blue has very little time or patience for white folks armed with preconceived notions about blacks in the western world coming into his space and trying to take charge. After spending a year and a half with these cowboys, I believe it's more likely that Blue may have encountered enough curious white folks to sense a notion that he's just a helping hand, a source of labor, if you will. Preferring to set the record straight about his seniority and character, Blue may very well have said to a white person or two "Look here mister white man I do this shit for a living."

It is understandable, to me, that Ray is concerned about manufacturing a representation of black cowboys that portrays an image of class and character. His preoccupation with the politics of respectability that governs everyday interactions black people have with white folks, in this case, does not apply. Out in the pasture they have a job to do and unpredictable animals to manage. The only thing a seasoned cowboy like Blue is concerned with is respecting the fragility of life and the reality of danger and mortality. After decades of playing the political games that come with doing business as a black man in the western world, Blue knows how to deal with "his" (southern) white folks. This much is a life lesson that extends to regional racialized identity and representation. Still, this conversation took me back to the months before I started collecting stories and personal experiences about how they illustrate navigating social realities of western living.

Like Ray, I stressed over how black people have been, and to some extent still are, represented in very limited capacities, taken out of context or not clearly represented in ways that cultural outsiders can understand and appreciate black's experiences. Ray's desire to give his mentor the opportunity to share his experiences and then negotiate how Blue's voice is represented is an example of this. Our concerns and vision for representing black cowboys were in alignment. However, we differed in perspective about the best way to represent black cowboys in western culture and this became a recurring theme throughout my journey.

The problem is that Ray is not entirely sure how to separate his suspicion of the institution that I represent from the trust we have built during the time I spent on his ranch helping in whatever way I could. For me, it is important to meet people where they are in understanding and points-of-view before moving forward to build and navigate new terrain. This meant addressing his concern to affirm that my intentions are good. What he doesn't know is that I worry about not being able to further clarify or translate the cultural meaning of my experiences with them into a language that a general audience can appreciate and not use as evidence for negative stereotyping. In this moment, while I can, I assure Ray that I understand his concern for accurate and respectable representations of black cowboys. I did this by sharing my experience with a historian who tried to deny the presence of black western experiences in the U.S. and the implications it could have had for the existence of this narrative.

The significance of doing the work to build trust is that it's not always entirely clear what kind of information I was looking for but I needed it to be clear that I was

committed to understanding his way of life. Part of respecting their time and showing appreciation for their experiences is stepping outside of my comfort zone and meeting them where they work and play to experience it for myself. This, as opposed to watching from the sidelines and scrutinizing their lives through a microscope, was necessary. Ray learned by watching then doing and, to some extent, while I was out on his ranch I did the same.

From the start, Ray made it a point to frame black cowboys as a model of class and character in western culture. When he says character, he means the values and behaviors associated with and representative of upper-middle and upper class people. What this tells me is that blackness is a salient part of the racialized cowboy's identity. Aside from these views being more commonly associated with broader concerns of black people in matters of race relations and representation, I thought it was peculiar to approach representations of the cowboy as a model of class and character. However, the same modes of expression and interaction that he is trying to censor out of concern for being misunderstood, is, what I feel, necessary to create a more complete picture of black cowboy identities. Nevertheless, I did my best to assure him that my treatment of black cowboys and black cultural experiences will be done with the dignity and respect that time and history has frequently cast aside.

The other way black people manage access to their personal space is to informally screen people before deciding to either invite them in or to pass them off to someone else who may not be as useful. This would eventually lead to a dead end. The concern for how black people are represented is evident in two ways. Ray, suggested

that I leave the voice of his old mentor out of this narrative because, to him, the man has no regard for respectability politics, or political correctness. The negotiation, or balancing act, is between wanting the history of black cowboys to be officially recorded, recognized, and appreciated versus trust.

The anchorwoman who reached out to Ray, or one of his people, didn't want to enter his world to experience it as he does day in and day out. This sent the message that she was not serious about representing black cowboys in a way they could be appreciated. People want to know but they want the knowledge to come easy. Cowboying is hard work and it don't come easy. It is a way of life, not a hobby, and the nature of western living requires a certain level of respect to ensure sustainability and safety. Respect in all things is a model of class and character. Ray wasn't interested in providing artifacts, videos, and pictures for someone who would not have stepped foot onto his property to experience what he does and then go away to create their own version of his life.

The revelation of my screening process came five months after first meeting one of Ray's mentees who invited me to see him and the guys castrate Ray's cows. On this day, I was riding with Ray in his truck on the way to go check on a tire for his trailer and pick up scraps of meat for his cow dogs. Ray told me that before I first came out to his property, he thought I was "some little 'old white girl coming to get all in [his] business." I asked what made him think that about me and he said that it was because all he knew about me was that I was "a researcher from [Texas] A&M."

Fortunately, I was accepted by many different cowboys who participated in western cultural practices in different ways. I spent plenty of time with rodeo cowboys and trail riders only one was a rancher. Each of these experiences were opportunities to show my genuine interest in understanding the world of black western culture and for them to show and tell me what it all means to them. It was just as important to me as is was to Ray, that I visually capture black cowboy experiences and their stories in first and third person narratives.

After a long day's work with Ray on his ranch, I noticed that people would drop by periodically to help him with different tasks that required more than one person and then leave. Many of those folks would come back by in the evening with a case of beer, or looking for a beer, and we'd stand around talking. I mostly listened. After getting as comfortable with them as they were with me, which didn't take long, I figured it wouldn't hurt to not be the only person standing around not holding a beer in my hand.

I'm no stranger to whiskey and cigars, because I knew some black cowboys before I knew they were "black cowboys," but I'm not a beer drinker. To me, it was enough that I was the only female out there on the property, except for when Ray's wife came out there after work. This made my presence slightly less of an odd sight. In the beginning, I wasn't dressed for sloshing around in horse and cow shit in the heat of the day or hanging out at night when it got cool. The functional purpose of long sleeve flannel or jean shorts and blue jeans with boots made more sense to me and it was like a whole new world all over again.

As I was learning new methods for relating to cowboys on the fly, I started sipping before gradually moving to just holding an empty beer can while standing around with everyone else. I had to navigate the rules of society to which we all have some relationship. After that, I felt just a little more accepted. I was beginning to look like I belonged. I stopped feeling out of place, once I no longer felt compelled to ask questions and they stopped asking questions about me. The personal experience stores just started to come as we encountered different situations that reminded someone of "a time when…" Eventually, they stopped asking me what I was writing down and telling me what they thought I shouldn't pay attention to. Sometimes, at the end of the day, no one said anything, and we all just enjoyed the quiet that comes with the sunset at the end of a long day of hard work. It wasn't long before I was invited to a trail ride

Ray: You ever been to a trail ride?

When the long day of work on the ranch happened to fall on a Friday, I had to switch gears and prepare myself for the way some cowboys play, or entertain themselves, on the weekend.

Party Time on the Trail ride

"You ever been to a trail ride?' Ray says matter-of-factly. Well, I'ma tell you now, it's gon be a lotta people out there. It's gon be folks dancin' under the big tent—they got a big white tent with a stage underneath — where they have dances." I didn't have a chance to answer the question, as I had barely gotten my right leg inside of this tall black Ford F-350 dually truck. I was focusing on my balance at the edge of the passenger seat while trying to close the door and not fall out. Once I finally built up the

momentum to swing the door of the truck and myself backwards, toward the inside of the vehicle, I turned to make eye contact and say "hello" but he had already moved on to reasoning how I should expect the space to be organized for this trail riding weekend. "They usually put the tent way back there on the back of the association property but it's supposed to rain so I don't know where they gon' set it up now."

You like zydeco [music]? You know they got J Ray Jr [and the Zydeco Nubreeds]. I don't know why they did that. I like 'em but I think they overrated. That money could'a went to something else." By now, we're driving out of my neighborhood— a new subdivision built just off a major highway on the Southside of Houston— towards the association property located just on the other side of the highway. I had begun to wonder what kind of people black cowboys are. As we drive under the highway's overpass and get closer to the association property where everybody camps out before waking up to set off on the trail ride in the morning, I notice that the neighborhoods and houses are older like many of the residents in that area.

This part of the city is predominantly lower-middle and lower class Black people. I later learned that the property where this trail ride and campout was being held is owned by this Black Trail Riders Association— there are others. This fact is a big deal to the members of the individual trail riding clubs that belong to "the association" because, I'm told that they are the only black trail riding association in the area that owns their own land. "Anyway, it's gon be folks drankin' an' dancin' and sittin' aroun' shootin' the shit; little kids gon' be everywhere runin' aroun' chasin each other — some of 'em gon be riding horses. I'm tellin you, people gon' be standin' around lookin' at the

girls walkin' aroun' in they lil groups and they gon be walkin' around lookin' at them boys. [Do] you got a man? Well, I'ma tell you now, all them niggas gon be tryin' to see how can you…how they can get you to come over an' talk to 'em. But im'a just let you see fuh yuhself. [Do] you got some boots? Well, it's supposed to rain this weekend so you betta' go get you some of them [black] rubber boots.

I hope you're ready because this trail riding experience is quite the production, as black culture is highly theatrical and quite the performative culture, in comparison to more standardized ways of doing culture.

Figure 22. Campout and trail ride at night. Trucks and trailers lined up along the perimeter of the trail riding association property.

Figure 23 Party wagon on a Trail ride.

Each type of cowboy participates in western cultural practices in different capacities as evidenced by their differing use of and relationship to horses, which are considered by most people to be a cultural artifact and staple of western culture in general. Through many conversations with Ray and other cowboys and my own observations of how they interact with each other in different western cultural spaces, I began to see that black cowboys recognize multiple masculinities among each other. This was partly dictated by how they maneuver fluidly between performatives of masculinities embodied by black male fashioning's of each cowboy "type."

The way black cowboys think about themselves as models of class and character challenges notions about cowboys as anti-social outlaws who simultaneously uphold the beliefs, values, and boundaries of "civilized" society on the frontier. It also challenges notion of black men as anti-social, outlaws. As models of class and character, black cowboys challenge mainstream depictions of their racialized masculinities as lacking breadth and depth of character beyond pathologized behaviors towards criminality or extraordinary and exaggerated physical strength.

Their interactions during campouts and trail rides display notion of "class and character" in the policing of each other's behaviors. These negotiations are framed with respect to the occupations that grant many of them social responsibility and required them to perform within the class status associated with their occupation. This sort of policing in this public-private space means to facilitate and maintain safe boundaries around place where black males can cast aside, at least symbolically if not temporarily, the veil of twoness. The campout part of the weekend long event consisting of a campout and trail ride is ideally a space where negotiations of male identities could occur on terms other than racialized or perceived racialized behaviors that might otherwise be interpreted as "boys being boys," "men being men," and the teaching moments shared between them.

CHAPTER VI

FAST BREAK TO THE ARENA: FAIR PLAY AND FOUL PLAY

In U.S. society, when we discuss gender roles we use examples from childhood such as girls pretending to cook using a life-sized kitchen and boys playing cowboys and Indians (complete with toy pistols). On November 22, 2015, 12-year-old Tamir Rice, a black boy from Cleveland, Ohio, was fatally shot by Cleveland police officer, 26-year-old Timothy Loehmann. Fox News, a national new source, reported the fatal shooting of Tamir Rice with the headline "Cleveland police shooting of boy with pellet gun justified, third expert says (Press 2015)." The first sentence of the article reads "A white Cleveland police officer had no choice but to fatally shoot a 12-year-old black boy carrying a pellet gun, an expert on police use of force said in a report released publicly Thursday by the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office (Press 2015)." What if Tamir Rice was just a cowboy, a black cowboy in training?

Boyhood is one of the few times in a black man's life when he has some protection to play with different types of masculinities without fear of fatal consequence. Let me explain. Those brief years are when "private" spaces, made private by marginalization and gentrification, guard him from the suspicious gaze of those seeking to scrutinize his motives for wanting to play cowboys and Indians. This young cowboy-in-training was not afforded the same leniencies to freely explore identities.

News reports inundated us with "the facts," that to me, seemed to have forgotten the reality of this young black boy's humanity and how that reality is not unique to his

experience but is part of the everyday reality of black boys in America. It is because of Tamir Rice that young black boys in the U.S. are having to be conscious of what they do for play because it may be taken as *for real* and result in death. The theoretical implications for, what writers often refer to as, citations become grounded in the reality of incorrectly citing something, like your identity. The consequences of being "read" or perceived by an outsider may yield invisibility at best and fatal consequences in the loss of life at worst.

My thoughts about this incident led me to imagine, perhaps projecting the experiences I had, growing up in a predominantly black community where I felt safe. In this predominantly black, urban community, a 12-year-old boy could wake up, eat a bowl of cereal, and be outside dressed is his cowboy best at the community playground before the grownups got out of bed. By the time any of the parents woke to look outside their living room windows and check on their sons, the western frontier of the playground, separating the kids from cars in parking lots and city streets is already safe, thanks to the band of young cowboys.

Then, one morning, when the leaves had already changed to earthy shades of brown, yellow, and orange, there was a slight chill in the air, the kind that makes you a little uneasy. One lone cowboy arrived early to the barn. Most adults would call it a swing set. He decided to take his pick of horse, before the other guys showed up, and he chose the fastest one in the row. On this day, he was going to need him.

His horse, which bears a striking resemblance to swing sets in city parks, has a speed that is no match for the horse power under the hoods of modern mechanical

machines crowned with red and blue lights that warn of impending danger. You see, this cowboy's horse could only gallop as fast as the cowboy's feet could take him. Remember, the cowboy is just a boy, inexperienced and still training for the day when he will get a chance to be the hero - to protect and serve. However, on this day, his youthful innocence is no match for the perception of black boyhood as fitting the description of the society's number one outlaw. He's a little slow at the draw of his toy pellet gun. It took less than 2 seconds for police officers to ride up, eliminating the standard 10 paces to the draw, breaking the wooden barrier that separates spaces designed to maintain safety for children at play.

What happens next is more than a transformation of boundaries around western culture and masculinity when the cowboy hero is black and wanted dead (or alive). Twelve-year-old Tamir Rice is fatally shot. But long before our young hero is born, the year is 1980 and there's another young cowboy in training. Meet 9-year-old Cam. He is going to his first "real" rodeo— the kind where all the cowboys wore wrangler jeans, with button down denim shirts, cowboy hats, and cowboy boots. This is the kind of rodeo where most of the cowboys are white except his father who roped, mostly as a hobby, on the weekends because he worked a regular 9-5 during the week. The horses and bulls were real and the chances of getting caught in a bind with one of these animals was a concern for all the cowboys— black, white, and Hispanic.

The view from the bullpen into the stands looks like a sea of country western white folks with a few mixed couples sprinkled in the crowd. "At least we're not the only black people here," young Cam thought to himself as he stood leaning, one foot on

the bottom rail of the metal gate that separated the competing cowboy and bucking bull from the bullpen and announcer's box. In the area around him, small groups of cowboys congregated who were also watching and commenting on the rider and bull. They were either waiting to compete or had just finished competing and were getting feedback from other cowboys.

Off to the side of the announcer's box, which overlooked the entire rodeo arena, there were stairs leading up to the registration table, housed inside the same box.

Figure 24. Black cowboy looking into the arena on his property where they use to host rodeos. Now it's used to hold cattle.

The cowboys lined up, one on each step, waiting to pay their entry fees and passed the time talking about who supplied the cattle and offering advice on how to get a good run on a specific cow they had drawn at a previous rodeo. Young Cam was an earshot away from all the masculine banter and he was learning the way of the cowboy. You see, real cowboys have good cow-sense and can tell you about the personality of a

cow if they've roped on him before. One man said, "Hell, I'da gave myself a lil mo' slack in the rope so when I got that sumbitch round his head and he'd a kept runnin.' And Id'a got him. I tell you, he got that rope 'roun' that ol cow's head and when he went to pull the slack the rope popped right off. Aw, he couldn't catch that cow if they painted a bullseye on 'em." He realized that they were talking about his father and it looked like they were trying to downgrade him. It was at this moment, on a cool November night out in Poteet, Texas,

Figure 25 Calf standing in what used to be a rodeo arena.

that a young black boy was inspired to become a rodeo cowboy and prove to all the white people that he could beat 'em.

He roped every chance that he got. But when he got up to middle school, and all through high school, his friends got into playing other sports like basketball, football, and other things. They left that western culture alone because it was country, and

country wasn't cool anymore. Cam kept going to roping events with his father until his father passed away from long-term exposure to asbestos at his job. Roping became a lifestyle that became more valuable to him as he learned how it could lead to bigger opportunities. This was a completely different perspective than he had back when he was just a kid who roped and went to ropings because his father took him along.

After high school, he started competing more so that he could win the $1000 required to register and start paying dues to the national roping association that professional cowboys are required to join. This membership meant that there would be a public record of his monetary success and undeniable proof that he was the best. It meant that he could beat 'em in their (white) rodeo world at "their sport." Along the way, he would learn that there were many lessons about how to be graceful in ungraceful situations, when you're one of two black cowboys at a professional roping event and both of you are exceptional.

Black and White Rodeos

The first thing that stood out to me was how elaborate the spectacle was for each rodeo compared to the others. I assumed this was a matter of how much money there was available to put on the rodeo and where organizers chose to allocate those funds. It seemed to me that the format of a rodeo came with standard and cultural representations adding different elements to enhance the experience as a reflection of taste and preference. The black or white signifier attached to the rodeo was dictated by who organized the rodeo and the demographic of the rodeo participants. This doesn't mean that cowboys of different races did not participate more so than there are only a few who

do. “A few” in these instances means 2-4 white or black cowboys participating in a team sport, depending on how we’re racially modifying or not modifying the rodeo. Depending on your perspective, it’s not common, or uncommon, to see a white and black cowboy competing as partners but that’s because of participation by black cowboys at the professional level.

By this time, I had been to at least 6 black rodeos that varied in size and production quality. I noticed how the structure of each rodeo was produced in a fairly standard way in terms of event order. This is something that didn’t change from black to white rodeos. There is a grand entrance, prayer, and the national anthem followed by the competition and, at some point, recognition and scholarships awarded to hardworking students. Depending on the budget and availability, the competition may be broken up by small intermissions where rodeo clowns would entertain the audience.

To this extent, I’d say that my experience at small scale rodeos, regardless of race, were hosted outside at an arena that may or may not have had stands for the audience to sit and watch. In these cases, people would back their vehicle up against the arena and sit, or stand, in the bed of their pickup trucks. The location of a small-scale rodeo may be on someone’s private property. The entertainment at rodeos this size is typically a speaker system turned up as loud as it can go, which is just loud enough, to hear the faint sounds of music from a playlist on someone’s phone. All of this, of course, if music is available. Another thing I noticed that was not standard at rodeos of all sizes, again, regardless of race, was the presence of rodeo clowns. I remember hearing on the radio one day that there is a worldwide shortage of rodeo clowns because people do not

respect it as a legitimate profession anymore. I had questions – reasonably so, I think. But, that's beyond the scope of this project.

The production quality of a rodeo depends on many things and one of those things is sponsorship. The larger (regional and national) rodeos tend to have bigger sponsors. For example, the Black rodeo that I went to in Huntsville, Alabama was sponsored by the Steve Harvey Morning Show and was held at an indoor arena where there were concession stands, clowns, balloon animals, a PA system that was loud enough for everyone to hear the music or announcements. Generally, there were more attractions than just the competition. This regional rodeo was the largest black rodeo that I went to during my times in the black western world. The scale of production quality for the rodeo in Alabama compared to a national rodeo, of which my only example is the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo (HSLR), did not extended beyond the weekend to last for 3 weeks and have events every night of the week like the HSLR. With sponsors like Coca-Cola, Miller Lite, Ford, and Mattress Firm, the resources available to the predominantly white board of the HSLR to leave an impact on the western world and how history is remembered is an option that is significant.

The cultural difference I noticed at black rodeos regardless of size or production quality is that there was always music. Even if someone had to roll all the windows down on their truck and turn the music up as loud as their speakers could handle, the people would have music to accompany the spectacle. As an outsider for a short period of time, I think that any outsider would notice the difference in musical taste at black rodeos. The preference was zydeco music with a little bit of rap music mixed in to speak

to the younger crowd. However, zydeco music seems to be a universal preference for country western black folks in the south.

About 30 Years Later: Politicking at the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo

I went to the 2015 Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo with Big Reach and different groups of his friends three days straight. On the first day, I went with him and "Black," his mentee. The second day, I got picked up from my house. I rode in the car with Big Reach, Black and a girl that Black invited. I think he knew her from the trail riding scene. The last day I was invited to go to the rodeo, I was, of course, with Big Reach and Black. This time, Big Reach's cousin came to the rodeo with us, too.

The first day, I left work, went home and changed clothes before parking at a hotel across the street from the carnival which was on the opposite side of the stadium from where Big Reach and Black were waiting for me. This was Thursday March 5, 2015 and Miranda Lambert was performing after the rodeo competitions. I was excited to see Miranda Lambert perform but I was more excited about getting to meet two black tie down ropers that I has seen compete at this rodeo since I was in middle school and high school — Fred Whitfield and, maybe, Cory Solomon. I thought it would be good to get their perspectives about experiences as black professional rodeo cowboys making a living from rodeo as a western cultural practice. I didn't get to see them in person. I wanted to interview them because they were the only two "black" cowboys that I had seen listed on the Houston Rodeo website under the "Athletes" page. A good number of the profiles didn't have pictures and you can't assume a person's race by their name. I learned later that there were others.

I was standing at the top of the stands, on the first level, in the middle of the walkway with foot traffic coming and going on either side of me. I was looking around at different groups of people – families, friends, and couples—when I glanced at the screen mounted at the entrance of section 139. There he was. Fred Whitfield was competing at tie down roping. Earlier, while we were walking up to the stands, Big Reach said that I might meet Mr. Whitfield. It wasn't until Tuesday March 17, while I was standing around observing people come and go from various entrances to the below section of the stadium, that Big Reach pointed Mr. Whitfield out to me. With a skeptical smile, the kind you make when you're thinking "Yeah right," he said "There go Fred Whitfield right there go talk to him. See if you can get your interview." I think he was skeptical about Mr. Whitfield speaking to me because of his reputation among other black cowboys maybe even person interaction he's had with Fred.

Over the months, I've heard other black cowboys refer to Fred Whitfield as a black man who thinks that he's white, or an Uncle Tom. I didn't get a chance to interview him but he did listen to my introduction, what I was doing, and what I wanted from him before taking out his phone to save my phone number. He said that he couldn't do an interview at that moment because he had to do something with some calves. I said "okay" and that it was nice meeting him. As I walked back to the group I came with, Big Reach and Black's female friend were watching me with big eager smiles waiting to hear the details of my conversation. They thought that he was going to be rude to me because I'm black.

Big Reach had been going to the rodeo daily before we met and he invited me to tag along. He had service level passes that allowed him into the hospitality room where the contestants, their friends, and family (who also had passes) waited with unlimited access to a meal of the day, an assortment of soda, juice, tea, water, ice cream, cookies, candies, salad, chips, and fruits. There was also a play area on one side of the room, symbolically sectioned off with folding chairs, for the female kin who were watching the babies and toddlers play while the competition was broadcast on a flat screen TV mounted on the wall above the kids. On the opposite side of the room there were a number of round tables with chairs set up for contestants and other guests to sit and eat.

I had access to celebrities in the rodeo world, had spoken to them, asked questions of them, and joked with Big Reach about his relationship with them. I didn't even realize how the concept of celebrity was functioning in this space that I was observing as a cultural outsider. This realization didn't occur to me until March 18, when Big Reach was going to speak to one of the calf ropers who was leaving the "Fan Zone." The Fan Zone is where they go after competing to take pictures and sign autographs. I was shocked and confused by this teenaged girl who was bent over with her hands on her knees. I thought she was having an asthma attack but I was confused because she was hyperventilating and smiling. I looked at her and thought "what the heck is wrong with you." I asked, "Are you ok?" just as her boyfriend walked over to check on her. The girl the, stood up and said, "I don't care he is so hot!" So, I looked at Big Reach and said, "Who is he?"

I don't remember what the man's name was but we went over to speak to him and security stopped us. He said that the athlete was done greeting fans, which to me, he clearly was not. Big Reach handled the situation gracefully and we stepped to the side because his plan was to meet the cowboy down in the hospitality room. The cowboy's mom stepped in and said, "Come on with us I know he wants to see you and talk to you." Big Reach replied, "I'll catch him downstairs [in the hospitality room]." The security team that kept us from getting close to the cowboy were dressed in black security uniforms and yellow vests. The team consisted of two black men and a black woman. I assumed that, because we were black, they didn't think we had any real business wanting to interact with the rodeo cowboys. After that, we walked towards the elevators and made our way down to the hospitality room to wait. What we were waiting for, I was never sure of, but my role was to participate and observe.

Along the way some of the other rodeo contestants stopped to take pictures with Big Reach and every time I would jokingly say "you're a celebrity" to which he would say "you sware!? No, I'm not." I had started calling him a celebrity more and more but I thought nothing of it in terms of the significance of that status for his role in my observations in this space. Big Reach didn't dress like the other cowboys who all looked the same. To me it was their white male, as "cowboy," norm. I thought nothing of this and, at the same time, I took the jeans button down plaid or solid color shirt with patches from their sponsors as something like the professional dress code for this culture. Big Reach didn't dress like them but that's because he wasn't competing but he was just as much one of them as a rodeo cowboy.

I came to this reflexive rationalization through different experiences because he was showing me *his* world. The event staff just worked there. I couldn't reasonably expect them to just *know,* or have rodeo insider knowledge of who's who in the rodeo world. On the other hand, and what made this apparent to me was on Wednesday March 18th. Big Reach said that one of the rodeo staff, a white man, had finally worked up the nerve to ask how he was getting these passes to keep coming into the arena at the service level with the contestants every day—as if he didn't belong. Big Reach's answer was funny to me but it could also be understood through Zora Neal Hurston's observation of how blacks talk to white researchers who come around "getting' in their business."

He told *the man that he was in the mafia and that Houston was his city so when these cowboys come to his city he makes sure they are taken care of and have everything they need.* To me that was another way of saying mind your own business but the white man's reaction "oh, oh. Well I ain't gon mess with you" said even more about how in this instance the man's impression of black masculinity was a limitation for him and an asset for Big Reach. This tactic does not always work out for Big Reach this way.

While we were sitting in the hospitality room watching saddle bronc busting and eating, different contestants were walking in and out of the room, which was not unusual. When the rodeo contestants came back into the hospitality room I noticed what looked like a difference between the ways they interacted with other contestants in the room versus Big Reach. For example, white male interactions in this space seemed, to me, short and impersonal, maybe even a matter of formality versus noticing Big Reach and perking up with a voluntary smile. Greetings were short "hellos" or quick head nods.

However, with Big Reach there were instant smiles "what's up man," "Congratulations" followed by "How are you doing?" "Where are you going next" or "Are you competing at the (insert name of the next calf roping/rodeo the coming weekend). There seemed to me to be genuine interest in what Big Reach had to say or, at least, seeing and being seen with him among the different (white) cowboys that came through the hospitality room. Another possibility for the way these interactions may be understood are in terms of immediate competition versus potential competition. As this moment Reach is not a competitor but the likelihood of "facing" him, or going up against his performance in the near future was very real. I'd take advantage of his expertise outside of direct competition at a moment when I feel like he's "disarmed."

The difference in how the white cowboys interacted with each other versus how they interacted with Big Reach is part of the reason why I jokingly teased him saying "these white people love you." He would sarcastically reply, "you sware?!" or he would say "girl hush." Then, one time, he said "I'm the only black person some of them know." Another thing about these interactions that struck me as odd was their behavior changed once Big Reach, being the conversationalist that he is, showed interest or at least asked questions about the person and gave the opportunity to pick his brain about some rodeo, technique, or offer their own critiques about their ride/run. This was always followed up with the questions about what Big Reach thought about their performance in the arena. Big Reach keeps his sunglasses on all the time. Unless I was paying close attention to his lenses, I couldn't see where his eyes were looking. I could only assume as much, based on the direction his head was facing. The reason he gave was so that females couldn't

see where his eyes were looking- in this case that's exactly what those glasses were preventing me from seeing. I say this because I'm not sure if he was even looking at the people he was talking to. I feel like he may have been looking past them and at the TV where the competition was being televised.

Although, Big Reach is a talker, this was significant because he doesn't necessarily care about the individual in some altruistic sense. He is a business man. In the rodeo world, a person can be your opponent in one rodeo and your roping partner in the next. While these cowboys are making small talk and seemingly trying to turn this into a full conversation, only a few people, may be three, were successful at this because Big Reach considered them actual buddies of his. The interaction would get awkward because of a moment of silence, which felt like forever, and they would stand there for a "reasonable" amount of time before coming up with an excuse to walk away. By this time, Big Reach had his full attention on the TV and there was an awkward silence because Big Reach stopped responding. It felt like an implied signal that "you are dismissed." I wondered what they were waiting for him to say. I suppose there was some hierarchy of sorts going on among these rodeo cowboys and Big Reach was someone to know and have as a resource.

Roping Lessons

"You wanna come with me? I got lessons, I gotta go out here to Friendswood and give this white man some lessons. He wanna be a real cowboy so he hired me to teach him how to rope. I figure you can see how they act one way and then change up on you." Now, I didn't need much convincing to be sold on the opportunity to see how a black

cowboy gets along teaching three white men, one of whom was older than he— in his early 50s, a dentist, and relatively new to participating in ropings and rodeo[30]. The idea of a white man taking lessons from a younger black man intrigued me for many reasons that go beyond the black and white of it all.

Unlike Cam, Black is tall with a slim athletic build and he's quite unassuming but he likes to joke around once he becomes familiar with new people. On this day, Cam was introducing him to three new ropers plus myself, thus exposing him to white people in the rodeo world and a black researcher. Today's experience was likely outside of his norm and the same for Cam, at least in part. The lesson was, if Black was going to be successful at winning the big money ropings, he was going to have to learn how to be comfortable being one of few if not the only black cowboy interacting with white cowboys (and people perceived to be agents of white folk's dealings). This is a different skill that was just as important as his level of expertise in roping. It was one of the two obstacles that Cam was trying to help Black overcome. The second obstacle was one that Cam was still trying to overcome himself. Roping is an expensive sport and if that's what you really love to do or are good at, you must find ways to sponsor yourself if you don't have sponsorship. This is a message that many trail riders who rodeo mostly at the black rodeos talk about as the major challenge.

I agreed to go and said that I would be ready for him to pick me up by 4:00 pm but, considering the demographic make-up of the group, Cam thought that either I

[30] Sometimes an event will be held just for team roping without the other rodeo events.

needed more convincing or to know what to expect considering the circumstances. As we were headed to his client's property, he said, "they gon be real standoffish at first cause I ain't never brought no girl out here with me to do lessons but after they see [that] you one of them, oh, they gon love you. Yeah, they gon love you cause you a…you go to A&M and you smart too…oh yeah, das gon make they dick hard." I was more interested in how southern notions of respectability would play out on the field of masculinity where race was concerned. I thought it would be interesting to see some of the code switching and boundary bending between the property owner, who was a white man about 6 years older than his instructor who has won thousands of dollars roping and is nationally ranked.

Cam continues to provide some context for me by explaining "I go out to this man's house, every Thursday, if I ain't got no roping to go to. And I stay out there about 2 hours and he brings 2 of his buddies and I teach 'em how to rope. Let me tell you this man has about 85 acres of land – he owns Friendswood – and he bought two really nice horses for roping. He'll buy all this nice fancy equipment to rope because I tell him what brand makes the best ropes and things. But let me tell you, all that money to buy the best equipment and things don't make up for talent. He could be pretty good if he just works at it but…well, here's the deal:

> I been giving this man lessons for about 6 weeks and he ain't got no better. And I have to tell him the same thing every time. After 'while he'll say "I know, I know" but he don't ever change and do different. He keep callin' me to come give him lessons. Listen. I been tellin' him to fix the same three

things for four weeks and it's just something in his brain that won't let him do it.

See...these people want me to teach them but they don't wanna listen to me. They hate taking instructions from a black person. They know I'm right and they know I know what I'm talking about or else they wouldn't be paying me all this money. I go to their house for months to give lessons and they don't do nothing I tell 'em. But then he let the next person— some white man at a rodeo— tell 'em exactly what I said and then they'll listen. But I don't care, they still pay me to come out here and I just repeat myself every time. White people got too much pride.

They know better but they just hate to do what a black person tell 'em, even if it means they'll do better.

Figure 26. A cowboy in the middle of demonstrating to his trainee how to swing his arm to get the right momentum and placement for his rope.

Figure 27. A team roper giving lessons on how to hold and swing the rope so that his trainee will not miss his mark when he's trying to rope the steer.

On this day, there were two other men, Brent's friends, who were there for lessons as well. The youngest was in his late twenties and had been roping on and off since he was in high school and is now an alumnus of Texas A&M University. The other man was in his fourties. The car stops and we open the doors to the black Dodge Charger. Cam, who was driving, gets out of the car right away and, with the biggest smile in his upbeat friendly way, says "what up fellas?" He walks around to the back of the car where the trunk is open and he's showing Brent some ropes that are for sale. Black is changing into jeans and boots— clothes more appropriate for roping — not like the basketball shorts and sneakers he was wearing on the way to practice. I, on the other hand, was suddenly reminded that I had not taken my allergy medication. I made a mental note of how one sneeze was enough for four of the five guys to stop everything and see if I was okay or needed anything like allergy medication, water, or Kleenex.

I was determined to be among the cowboys and the aspiring cowboys for the evening of interplay between masculinities. It was an awkward struggle for all parties involved, to say the least. Afterwards, I brought up the tension or sense of competition that I felt between Cam and Brent when he's supposed to be teaching them how to rope. Cam made a few attempts at starting to explain his perspective and each time he changed how he started his explanation. I think that he's thought about this before and now that I've explicitly asked him the question he wanted to be as politically correct, or "safe", as possible. When he couldn't get around, what he may have determined was, the ugly truth of the matter he explained as best as he could from his perspective starting with "Here's what I think…"

Whether he wants to be a real cowboy or not, I don't know. See, Brent is a nice guy an' all – they all are— to a point. Don't get me wrong he's real hospitable but he can say some things that make you look twice like "what the fuck!" But I don't let that bother me 'cause he don't know no better. He wants the best and that's why he hired me to come out here but he don't get no better cause he don't wanna listen to what I tell him. It something about having to listen to a black man tell you what to do that they just can't get past— even if I am good at roping.

They like me because I'm entertaining to them. But the deal is I speak the truth and tell 'em the truth. Once they hang out with me, they know exactly how I am. They know what I do, what I ain't gon do, you know what I'm sayin'. Like Brent, when I first met Brent, he was umm…He was skeptical about me because he look at it…He…Know what they do? They look at all these YouTube videos I got and they say "man Camo is in [Las] Vegas, he drinkin', he partyin', he in the limo, he got girls." They get a different image so, Brent, he told me from day one he said "dude, my wife was really worried about me and you roping because she think you a gangster." Now why would she think that? So, I asked him, I said "why would she think that, Brent?" and he told me "you got your pants saggin' you got chains on you got the shades, you in the club in the limo ridin' in the car jamming to the music" and I said, "well what does that mean?" He fired back "you gangster." So, I said "what happen when

> LeBron James got on street clothes, they interview him, he has cars, he's listenin' to rap music, does that mean he's gangster?" In the quickest most dismissive tone he says, "Ain't the same."

Just because he's a black man in the rodeo world it's still a white world. LeBron and his teammates play with other black men. Basketball is a sport dominated by black males and the diversity of blackness creates a space to promote many ways to negotiate and represent black masculinities. There's nothing wrong with this. During Super Bowl 50, media outlets targeting black culture highlighted how Cam Newton and the Carolina Panthers were unapologetically black the entire season. These displays of black cultural aesthetics for ways of being black and masculine, of course, were met with just as much criticism. However, they have a mainstream audience that includes black viewership to speak to and against detractors of anything that does not directly speak to what's popular in American culture.

Cam thinks that

> 'Cause I'm in the rodeo world I'm in the white world. LeBron 'nem play basketball with niggas. The niggas is dominant in that. White people [are] dominant in roping so if you don't look like them, you ain't them. If you're good…just think, let me think. Look at Tiger Woods. Golf is a white people sport. When Tiger Woods win, they try to say he ain't black, he's somethin' else — he black. Then, Tiger Wood got in trouble with his wife. They took all that money from him. If a white man done that they wouldn't have done shit. They try to take everything from him ["the black

> man"]. The President [William "Bill" Clinton] getting his dick sucked in the White House, he keep being the President. What the fuck the President doing getting' his dick sucked in the White House? He [supposed to be] trying to save the country. What is the big deal about Tiger Woods cheating on his wife? They made a big deal out of it. He brought the bitch from nothin'. That's chicken shit, I think."

A Lesson in Dining with the Klan

The roping lessons were going as good as one could expect. Considering the two cowboys were dealing with three different personalities as manifestations of whiteness. There was one outspoken white man who was afflicted with serious issues of macroaggression no doubt stemming from a history of racial scapegoating. This man was the property owner and he invited two other friends to take lessons at his house. The friend closest in age to the property owner was not so outspoken but he seemed to passively support the ignorant comments being made about the blackness of their roping instructor who took time to teach them a skill popular in the culture of which he is a minority. The youngest of the three was, at the time, a recent graduate of Texas A&M University, and white man who seemed only interested in roping and, at times, clearly uncomfortable by the race jokes.

There was one point during the roping lessons and, I assume, one too many race jokes Cam turned to me and asked if I knew any KKK members. My response was that "I don't believe I've ever had the pleasure of meeting any KKK members that I know of." After I said no, he went back to addressing the group and telling the story about how

he has seen a burning cross on the way to a rodeo and the story about being told that he was the only black person that some white man had ever allowed into his house or even on his property.

Cam interpreted this fun fact as the man being a member of the KKK. After the roping lessons, I asked him how he felt about his encounter with the man he believed was a Klansman. He didn't seem to want to go into detail about it but he did tell me that being the only black person to have been allowed to dine at a "Klansman's table" made him feel embarrassed as a black person and that he didn't get much sleep that night. This transitioned into a story about how sometimes he gets himself into trouble by not staying inside of the boxes we create for each other based on race and other socially defined identities. He starts with how he "breaks" the dress code or will wear something in a different way than it was intended to be worn. All of this is partially in response to his perception that 99% of white people are the same right down to how they dress. In his own words, Cam explained it to me like this:

> Well the deal is, in the rodeo world 90% of the people wear the same thing. Like you see how I wore them pants to the [black] rodeo last night? In a white rodeo I'da stopped the whole rodeo. They woulda' had a media flash. They don't see that kind of stuff. They would have made the biggest deal out of it on the loudspeaker you ever heard. The announcer would have said "wow did you see Big Reach pants tonight?" They would have made a big deal out of it, because they don't see that. You go to a black rodeo, hell, that's

normal. "Nigga got on some goddamn fancy britches." You know what I'm sayin'. Oh, but white people, oh hell naw. Every white person that rodeo wear the exact same thing. They wear wranglers with wrangler shirts. They might have different patches but they all got the exact same clothes on everybody. I use to wear them...you ever see them hats women wear like they sold last night? You see the hats they selling? Them Tim McGraw lookin hats? I use to wear one of them. It used to make…

Myeshia: yeah

Cam: I use to wear one of them. I used to draw so much attention to myself at the rodeo the cowboys couldn't stand it. "Why you gotta wear that hat Cam? That's not a real cowboy hat" I don't give a fuck what they think, you know what I'm sayin'. But the media, the public, they dig that shit. I went to the rodeo in Allensburg, [Washington]. I had a hat on like that and I won they made the big, the people went crazy! Das cause of the hat. They thought like "wow." But, I let people know you don't have to look like a fuckin John Wayne to be in the rodeo. You know what I'm sayin it's not the same you...I don't wanna be lookin' like everybody else "hell naw!" But the deal is though, let me tell you what's bad though and the thing that I do that's bad. In a way, it've done stuff to help me, I've done stuff to kill me. Cause rodeo is a redneck world. If I'm good at what I do...

Myeshia: What [have] you done to kill yourself, if it's not tellin' these folks about the KKK

Cam: But they think that's funny. You think these white folks give a fuck about the KKK? 99% of white people are racist. So, that's their culture, they already know.

Southern black folks know how to deal with their white folks. What I mean by this is that the abolition of slavery in the U.S. became a matter of economic and political struggles between southern whites and the rest of (white) America. It didn't take long before white folks began to shift their discursive focus towards each other's way of life as a matter of regional identity. The narrative among northern white folks about their southern brethren is of modernization. It deals specifically with how white folks of the south were stuck in the past, "backwards," economically and socially. Regardless of which side of the train tracks, or in this case, Mason-Dixon line you are on, there seems to be a general sense that northern white folks are more modern, if not just different from (traditional) southern whites on issues of race.

These commonsense ideas about white people are rooted firmly in the notion that all white folks come from an ilk that wanted to abolish slavery because of immorality. In this narrative about the difference between the way northern and southern white people feel about black people it matters not that the land in the North was ill suited for agriculture and the slaving business. Perception here is a significant part of establishing and talking a closer look at where notions of the south, as a whole, came to be broadly seen as a place where the (white) people represent a particular historical narrative.

According to Davis L. Carrolton, in "Rethinking Southern History," "a narrowly based oligarchy lorded over its poor, thanks to a political system devoted to the perpetuation of tribal enmities. And of course, there was white supremacy (2001, 39)."

As Southern identities have shifted and transformed over time so have the ways in which southern blacks developed methods to "deal" with their own white folks. The ways in which the southern brand, or style, of contempt for someone because of their blackness ranges from subtle to overt forms of macroaggression and subtle to overt forms of racism. There is a commonsense notion that the problem with white folks is pride and that pride is a psychological challenge white folks have yet to overcome but to that extent white pride is beyond the scope of this narrative.

The micro-aggressions that black men face in the rodeo world are symptoms of a larger cancer that afflicts American culture and society. Cam, being the teacher that he is, uses this as a teaching moment. He wanted to show Brent how this idea of a black cowboy being a gangster because of the way he dresses and talks is a form of prejudice. His method, storytelling and analogies, didn't seem to do the trick this time, like the many times before. So, Cam took the opportunity to poke holes in white men's logic about black masculinity.

Heading and Heeling

In the cultural world of rodeo, team roping is a subcultural practice where teams of two cowboys work together to rope a calf. There are other types of rodeo events that cowboys participate in involving various types of interaction with cows at different stages of development. Upon closer scrutiny of the cowboys, in relation to the event(s)

in which they participate, there is a visible, as opposed to biological, variation in a man's size and stature. I have observed an inverse relationship between the size of the cowboy and the size of the animal. For example, bull riders tend to be shorter than the average man's height. The nature of bull riding requires that the bull and the rider have conflicting goals for each other. The bull is provoked to kick and buck the rider to eject him from his back while the bull rider means to stay mounted on that bull for at least 8 seconds. This is the set amount of time for the ride to qualify in the ranking system. I have learned that this body type is best suited for bull riding because of the man's center of gravity. To this end, conversations about a cowboy's relationship to his horse and cows, or bulls, extends beyond the discrete categories that separate man from beast in the arena.

Figure 28. Gated box that holds the animal or athlete before a signal is given to release the animal and/or cowboy.

In team roping, the only rodeo event where the team can be mixed gender, is when two cowboys work together to rope a calf in an arena. Each participant is placed in their own pen, until the signal is given and the barrier can then be broken for the roping to begin. If all goes according to plan, which means that once the barrier for the calf is broken it will take off running, to get a head start. There is a predefined line on the ground and once the calf crosses that line, the two ropers can break their barrier and come out swinging their ropes to catch the calf. Typically, "the header" will swing his rope first to catch the calf around the head and swing him around to where the back of the calf if facing the heeler. "The heeler" will take his turn immediately after the header but his target is to catch the calf by his heels. Once the animal is securely roped at the head and heels, the cowboys simultaneously pull back on their horses to extend the ropes and stop the steer.

Figure 29. A steer that has been tagged for tracking

When cowboys talk about their animals they almost always use feminine pronouns. Even when the cow is a male he is still referred to in this way. An example of the way being country cool and borrowing from different sources to make a new slang has adapted the language of gender into discourses of ritualized rodeo practices is, in my opinion, most colorfully articulated in a conversation between a team of two calf ropers about me. The way they use the function of heading and heeling a steer expands the lesson in technique for roping a steer into a lesson on "how to get the girl." In this

conversation, the steer, a male domesticated cow that has been castrated, provides a great example of how gendered language becomes coded and doubles to have layered meaning among interactions with the opposite sex.

As a rodeo outsider, picking up on this sort of the double entendre took me a little bit of time. I knew there was something deeper to the conversations between Cam and Black and that it had something to do with me. The "ah ha" moment came when Cam asked me if I was "heading" or "heeling" while we were at the Houston rodeo, about a month after we first met. It's important to note that this was about a month of successfully evading questions about my relationship status. The extent to which the interplay of meaning comments on ideas and practices of gender and orientation fascinated me for many reasons. From the role of the steer to the shift in meaning for heading and heeling, I started to pick up on pedagogies of western masculinity through black cultural practices.

In the context of the question posed to me— "are you headin' or heelin'?"— I interpreted these terms to double as references to my sexual orientation. The terms don't function in the same why when two guys are "competing" to catch, trap, or win, the prize. Also, the gender representation of the "the steer" doesn't neatly map onto my em(body)ment as a female. In one instance, I, "the steer," am part of the game whether serious or not. Each man would manipulate his proximity to me through calculated interaction and inaction. In the arena this method is meant to corral the steer to go the cowboy's intended direction (i.e., away from one person towards the other).

CHAPTER VII

RIDING OFF INTO THE SUNSET

Framing the story of how the west was won is significant because it is a type of origins story in which the cowboy, as a national hero, is defined and used as a model in the hierarchy of masculine types in U.S. history. In the archive of narratives, the unmarked, or "just" cowboys, are the exemplar of normative masculinity. In the western world, cowboys, marked by their skin color, are marginalized almost to the point of invisibility. Black cowboys embody a masculinity informed by notions of blackness that are historically ranked as inferior and the history of their invisibility in western culture is interpreted in different ways. The relationship between these two racialized masculinities creates an interesting space to pause and consider how black cowboys, who did not become the anti-hero in the story but, were virtually left out of the narrative, with a few exceptions, talk about and embody how they understand their role in American western culture, manhood/masculinity, and race.

The diversity that characterizes narratives of black masculine experiences illustrates that ways of looking at black masculinities are as varied as the number of people there are to perform the racialized gender identity. These narratives detail how the social construction of "race" and gender influence negotiations between relationships of dominance and subordination. More specifically, these narratives about power illustrate how racialized identities are contested and negotiated around gender identity in

African American communities. Black males' narratives also show how these factors have little relationship to their notions of masculinity as static and homogenous.

In mainstream culture and society, commonsense notions of black masculinity are developed and negotiated through black cultural politics of gender within particular socio-historically defined notions of race and gender. Black cowboys shift cultural cues and codes to play with meanings associated with blackness, whiteness, masculinity and western-ness to produce an interesting view into how they embody social characteristics and transform them through social interaction with the past and present. This type of play creates a space to discuss the potential for change in how we engage notions of black masculinity in the future. Preliminary research reveals that Black cowboys generally agree on three types of cowboy identities - rancher, rodeo cowboy, and trail rider. The three "types" of cowboys are socially designated based on black western subcultural practices. Although not every man with a horse is a cowboy, black cowboys generally understand this cultural identity as having "authentic" foundations in a particular type of racialized masculinity[31].

Being Country Cool

Black cowboys who interact with each other's in the privacy of campouts and trail ride spaces display "class and character" in the policing of each other's behaviors. Many of the people in this public-private space had occupations that granted them social

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[31] There are other folk groups that use horses in ways that are not U.S. western cultural practices but are considered so in the high/low cultural sense (equestrian riding) Also mention how Trail riders as cowboys are debatable and debated among the "real" (ranchers and rodeo) cowboys

responsibility and required them to perform the class status associated with their occupation. This sort of policing was meant to facilitate and maintain a space where black males could cast aside, at least temporarily, the vail of twoness observed by W.E.B. DuBois. The campout is part of a weekend long event consisting of a campout and Trail ride. This is the ideal space where negotiations of male identities could occur on terms other than racialized, or perceived racialized, behaviors that might otherwise be interpreted as "boys/men being boys/men."

I was Country Before Country was "Cool"

I drove five hours from Houston to get a different rodeo experience. Up to this point I had been to a larger black rodeo in an indoor arena where larger cash prizes were offered to the contestants and smaller qualifying rodeos for professional ropers to compete for national rankings. This one time in The Valley, I seen a big deal made of a price tag that Big Reach left on his cowboy hat. As we were walking to the loading area entrance to the arena towards the office where the cowboys were supposed to check in, I thought he had missed the tags on his hat. Since he was removing the price tags from his brand-new denim shirt, I made two attempts to tell him that the price tag was left on his hat.

The parking lot in the back of the arena was for contestant parking and many were already in the loading area behind the arena preparing for their turn to compete. Others were watching contestants who were already competing. "Well," I said, "you're not going to take the tag off." Big Reach, in full stride without looking back, said "no I'mo take it back. This hat cost me $230." All I could do was shake my head, smile, and

think to myself "black folks." At this point, no one sees the tags until we are walking into the loading area, where Big Reach was greeted by another cowboy. The familiar acquaintance says to him "hey man, did you just get in [to town for the rodeo?]." Big Reach said "yeah, I had to stop and get me somethin' to eat," as he tucked the back of his shirt into his jeans. The man said, "Hey you left the tag on your hat!" This too was ignored as Big Reach said, "Hey I gotta go check in, I'll see you inside."

We walked inside, to the office where the cowboys were supposed to check in, get their packets complete with a meal ticket and their bib number. He pointed the way for me to get to the audience seating in the arena. Despite multiple people pointing out that the tag on his cowboy hat was visible, to the right people in the arena, Big Reach had a plan which included me recording his run [at roping a steer].

The bullpen, where the steer and each roper were located at the North end of the arena. I chose a seat on the east side of the arena so that I could get a full side view of the team roper's run at roping the steer. The announcer's box was located opposite the contestants and there was a big screen opposite the bull pen. He's in the box and the announcers are introducing the header and listing his accomplishments thus far in the rodeo season. Next, they introduce Big Reach. When I looked up at the screen, there it was. They zoomed in on his hat with the price tag and as I'm sitting in a sea of people waiting for the bubble of embarrassment to burst, the announcer says "you've gotta be one cool guy to pull that off." After the rodeo, we went to Whataburger and he took that hat back. "I got friends that's 30 and 40 years old that's getting into roping right now and they've never even rode a horse before. And you know when I see 'em, I laugh and

they wonder why…I laugh because I'm like what turned you into this. I swear I don't know. Roping…being country, now, [is] a fad to everybody." I took this to mean, if you're going to follow the trend, make a bold statement that shakes up the foundation that upholds the status quo.

Coolness: The Tale of Why the 'Nigga got on some Goddamn fancy britches'"

Cam is a black man set in a world where he has the capital to suspend the ordinary laws that govern his body and embodiment of blackness and masculinity. Because the history of the cowboy is one of erasure, his overly show presence taken from an aspect of black cultural performance commands attention and to be acknowledged. He is undeniably visible as more than just black. This allows him to make the kinds of statements that he wants to make about looking and being a certain type of way to be a cowboy or not looking and being a certain way while still being a cowboy, or western. This also applies to looking and being black and still being considered trustworthy or a "friend" to some of the best in the business of roping-rodeoing.

When I asked why he intentionally goes against the conventions of western dress he explained it to me using an estimate of statistics and personal experiences. In a very candid way he says to me:

> Well the deal is, in the rodeo world 90% of the people wear the same thing. Like, you see how I wore them pants to the [black] rodeo last night. In a white rodeo, I'da stopped the whole rodeo. They would'a had a media flash. They don't see that kind of stuff. They would have made the biggest

deal out of it on the loud speaker you ever heard. The announcer would have said "wow did you see Big Reach pants tonight?" They would have made a big deal out of it because they don't see that. You go to a black rodeo hell that's normal. "Nigga got on some goddamn fancy britches," you know what I'm sayin. Oh, but white people, oh hell naw.

Every white person that rodeo wear the exact same thing. They wear wranglers with wrangler shirts. They might have different patches [on 'em] but they all got the exact same clothes on. Everybody. I used to wear them...you ever see them hats women wear like they sold last night? You see the hats they sellin'? Them Tim McGraw lookin hats? I used to wear one of them. It used to make…I use to wear one of them. I used to draw so much attention to myself at the rodeo the cowboys couldn't stand it. "Why you gotta wear that hat Cam? That's not a real cowboy hat" I don't give a fuck what they think, you know what I'm sayin'. But the media, the public they dig that shit. I went to the rodeo in Ellensburg, Washington, I had a hat on like that and I won. They made the big, the people went crazy, das cause of the hat. They thought like "wow." But I let people know you don't have to look like a fuckin John Wayne to be in the rodeo. You know what I'm sayin, it's not the same you...I don't wanna be lookin' like everybody else "hell naw!" But the deal is though, let me tell you what's bad though and the thing that I do that's bad. In a way, I've done stuff to help me, I've done stuff to kill me. 'Cause rodeo is a redneck world.

Cam's exaggerated performance of race and masculinity facilitate the creation of tales framed by western cultural practices that comment on their social realities. Black males who participate professionally in cowboy culture inform the use of personal experience narratives as they are embedded in stories told about their extraordinary abilities. These amazing tales about values, beliefs, skill, and ability draw on stereotypical notions of race and gender that have been normalized. However, when any tale is twice told, the distance created by the time and space from the original event allows for some fictionalizing.

Through the process of taking some "ordinary" event worthy of being re-told, so it must have already been extra-ordinary, the beliefs and values communicated become exaggerated. This means that beliefs about black males' abilities because of their race and gender become stretched and exaggerated. Put simply, these tales that uphold stereotypical notions of blackness and masculinity are reminiscent of the tropes we use to confine social actors and communicate generalizations about race and gender. Tales about black cowboys are the kinds of stories that legends are made of. Nevertheless, there is usually something at stake, a price to pay, such as the ideal image to uphold and maintain as the exception to socially defined rules placed on notions of ability based on race.

The materiality of coolness exists in this context of doubling where Big Reach doesn't fit the tropes that make up the archive of official narratives written around blackness, masculinity and western culture but he is still "cool" and black "cool." His ability to play on power is derived from black cultural practices, privileging of middle

class values, and his sex/gender privilege. This enables Cam to teach lessons that challenge prejudiced notions of blackness and masculinity through the way he embodies particular types of blackness and black masculinity in different social situations choosing to be graceful in ungraceful situations.

The drag of being a black cowboy is the illegibility of race and gender in western culture and mainstream black culture (Iton 2008). The effect of this inability to read black masculinity out of what the cowboy represents means further marginalization in black and mainstream cultures. The contributions that black cowboys make to defining blackness in the repertoire of cowboy's fashioning of western culture is a contemporary process with roots in U.S. black western frontiers and stories of a masculine manhood.

In westerns culture, cowboys marked by their blackness are marginalized in popular media and virtually invisible among their cowboy contemporaries. The representation of a complex masculinity, as a hero and outlaw, symbolized by the cowboy is not associated with or mapped onto black bodies because of this invisibility. Black cowboys interpret the effects of this invisibility and the history of black's invisibility in different ways. For example, the way individual cowboys define the term "cowboy" guides evaluations of men as real cowboys. These definitions are loosely based on notions of work versus labor and outline the ideological boundaries around notions of authenticity. For example, real cowboys *do* this; wear that, act like this, etc.

The historical narrative which guides popular notions and mainstream characterizations of African American males is the idea that black men are lazy. This stereotype is rooted in slavery in the U.S. and it is generally and generously applied to

African Americans. The result of this stereotyping manifests in social-cultural interactions of the way black cowboys distinguish among three cowboy-types, and the way they understand each other's manhood and masculinity. As cowboys, stereotyping based on race becomes a challenge. However, black cowboys can easily become labeled as exceptional among their peers. This exceptionalism has its limits.

Commonsense notions of black masculinity are developed and negotiated through black cultural politics of gender within particular socio-historically defined notions of race and gender in mainstream culture and society. By shifting cultural cues and codes, black cowboys play with meanings associated with blackness, whiteness, western-ness, and masculinity. This produces an interesting view into how the embodiment of social characteristics are transformed through interaction with the past, present, and the potential to change how we engage notions of black masculinity in the future.

The Legend of Big Reach

Exaggerated performances of blackness and masculinity through western cultural practices facilitate the creation of fantastic tales about black cowboys. The uniquely uncommon perspective of a black man who participates professionally in western practices frame uses of personal experience embedded in a legend that draws on notions of race and gender. These stories that draw on stereotypical notions of blackness and masculinity are reminiscent of tales of Black cowboys that are the kinds of stories legends are made of. "Have you ever heard any legendary stories about yourself…?" I asked.

Cam: Oh, I always hear everything. Crazy shit.

Myeshia: I mean as a roper…

Cam: yeah you know what I'm sayin' in like ropin' people will always say like (pause to think about something) …I'm trademarked that's why I call myself "Big Reach" they swear I can throw the rope farther than anybody and catch. You know what I'm sayin' like "it's amazing what he can do it's a miracle" but people always say stuff about roping "Cam did this roping. Can you believe he did that [roping]" You know what I'm saying but like me it ain't no big deal to me, just like roping, what the fuck?

Myeshia: What's the craziest story you've heard about you and what you've done…

Cam: Roping?

Myeshia: Yeah… roping before?

Cam: Well I had a man tell somebody one day "Cam tied two ropes together and roped a dummy like it wasn't nothing." That's like 80 ft. That's like almost the length of a Basketball Court. (An American professional basketball court is 94 ft.)

That's a long way you know what I'm sayin' but I ain't never done that (pause as if to reconsider) I don't think. I might have tied two ropes together and done like 50/60 ft. maybe. But they make it seem like oh he can rope from one side of the…he can stand on top of the basketball rim

and rope on the other side of the rim to the other side. They say dumb shit. It's all hearsay.

Myeshia: That's why people are calling you to stay at their house and teach them [how to rope]. When you got stories like that that means you're legendary…

Cam: I'm tellin' you when I got to people's house we gon be up all night. That's a done deal. They gon put the story in their hands and they gon change it all the way around. Whatever way I say it they gon make it a lil more juicier.

Popular representations of the black men are repeated through various manifestations in U.S. history of (in) visibility functions at the intersection of (dis)ability. The racialized gender identity of black cowboys as black men each have stereotypes and connotations that reinforce commonsense notions about one's abilities based on race and based on gender. These commonsense (preconceived) notions about this their abilities based on gendered notions of ability conflict with stereotypical ideals about their ability based on race. While black males' sex/gender identity may grant them "male privilege" it is quickly tamed by perceptions of ignorance, or ignorant perceptions, based on race. When I asked Ray about his role in making sure that people have access to the stories and legends of black cowboys this is what he said:

Ray: That's what we got you for right now. Nobody has written this stuff down. And I'm at fault as well 'cause I went to school— I know better— and I just don't have time to do it.

Myeshia: Well like you said everybody [has their] role. And bein' that all this history is there and ain't too many people touched it before…

Ray: let me tell you somethin' if you wrote a book on this I guarantee you it'd be a best seller anywhere.

First of all, you gon sell out in Houston 'casue everybody wanna know this, everybody wanna know this. And then its gon get so…its gon go viral.

Ray: Oh, it's a lot of people don't know. It's a lot of people don't know it's a bunch of cowboys that don't know. These so-called cowboys they don't know who Tony Travis is. Blue know and the guys that help us down there on the ranch there know. But Tony Travis was phenomenal and we had one other guy, his name was uh, I can't leave him out the history books cause he is the reason…well one of the reasons I know so much I know about horses. His name is Buster Thorn.

As black males transmit cultural knowledge about their identities and positionality in broad social-cultural contexts from generation to generation through social interactions, I question how are they negotiating what it means to be masculine among each other? Black males are perceived to be hardened beyond reason. They are portrayed as unreasonable and unintelligible in the media and, consequently, are dealt with like animals by agents of dominant social structures in which hierarches of race and gender prevail over class and character. These social interactions require a sobering

awareness, clarity, and lowering the "so-called" guard, though exterior, and cool-pose that black males are portrayed to have in academic and popular media (hooks: Cool Pose).

For example, manifestations of respectability that, culturally, are reminiscent of Southern Black American culture and reminds us of the views espoused by Booker T. Washington. In one sense of this we see nationalistic notions of black male identity that is generally understood as unmarked but situated as something that is negotiated in the presence of certain racist individuals. What I see at work in his explanation is a lack of connection between the way his view of those few "bad" apples seems to guide the way he portrays himself, who he allowed himself to be seen with, and who he expressly distances himself from being associated with.

Many people don't know that Black cowboys exist and while Black cowboys are aware of their virtual invisibility in national discourses and representations of western culture and history, some of my participants characterize their identity as (Black) cowboys as representative of "class and character." This depiction of Black western identity brings together notions of respectability within Black communities with the "rough" "rugged" imagery of mainstream depictions of cowboys as the manliest of (American) men. Black cowboys think of themselves as models of class and character and in this way challenge notions about cowboys as anti-social outlaws who simultaneously uphold the beliefs, values, and boundaries of "civilized" society on the frontier. Furthermore, as models of class and character, black cowboys challenge mainstream depictions of their racialized masculinities as lacking breadth and depth of

character beyond pathologized behaviors towards criminality (the super predator) or extra-ordinary physical strength.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS

I investigated the concept of racialized masculinity through the experiences of Black cowboys. Black masculinity reflects and refracts experiences and perceptions of Blackness beyond its relationship to (sex)uality and competition. I identified three ways that limited information about Black cowboy creates a peculiar position regarding notions, representations, and understandings about the racially signified cowboys. One common issue regarding Black identity that scholars reproach is the idea that it is pathological and homogenous. Understanding how both the media and Black cowboys cultivate boundaries to reinforce or diminish notions of masculinity and racialized masculinities of Black males as Black cowboys is important to establish frameworks for further considerations about Black masculinity.

Given that the history of the American West is one where blackness is perceived to have no place in the westward expansion and building of U.S. territory, the narrative trajectory of these cowboys is underdeveloped. I was curious about the way in which black cowboys acquired and generated knowledge of self, as black men, in western culture. Specifically, to the process of knowledge production, I wanted to know how this information was used among peer groups to influence notions of black masculinity within western culture. I believe that the crossroads, or intersections, where human manipulation of social identities holds the transformative power of self and other that is

greatest. This is why I became interested in the transformative power in black masculine embodiment of western identities.

The visibility of Black (male) subjects in mainstream (White) American cultural spaces demonstrated how the racial designation of a person negatively influences responses to identities that are appropriated by the dominant culture. I will add that the severity of negative responses increases when the cultural figure is positioned as a national icon. This ethnographic inquiry led me to explore when and how a Black cowboy who can afford to be a member of the P.R.C.A attends a rodeo where he is the demographic minority applies lessons from his black community. I looked for indicators in my data that answered how or why a black cowboy might want to distance himself from other Black cowboys and how or why he might want to emphasize the ascribed characteristics associated with class status, or (white) middle class values. The issue addressed here is the power dynamic of binary constructs and marginalized identities being viewed as emulating mainstream society that reinforces the binary.

This introduced issues of national citizenship and representation. The role of black cowboys and how to read their embodiment gets complicated when you're talking about a figure that is the hero and the villain who is responsible for policing borders and facilitating the expansion of a territory that's something that's heavily policed by historians. When I started this journey, the social-cultural world of black masculinity, as I had experienced it from the position of both a subject and object of intertextual discourses, was a labyrinth of overt and covert ways of being in the world.

The many colorful ways that black men communicate how "things aren't always what they seem to be" has been a lesson that we, as people, often teach each other about life in general. However, when black men are advocating for more humanistic representations of themselves, the black man who says "you ain't gotta look like no John Wayne to be a cowboy" grounds this notion in presenting the likeness of black masculinity in the depiction of a human being. This statement goes beyond the racialization of cultural practices and the gendered division of labor.

Black men are nurturers and cultivators of the ways their identities acquire meaning. In this narrative, they are not the brute, beast, buck, or bucking bull that is meant for (other) men to break, beat or tame. John Wayne, as history and popular media has written, was not real. The empirical reality of black cowboys— black men— transcends the emptiness that characters, like John Wayne, stand in to mediate in structural hierarchies. These realities provide an understanding of the complex way black men navigate everyday interactions while filtering information to produce knowledge for the next black man to consciously think about the way he has already been cast and to either embody an alternative representation thereof or maintain the status quo.

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